

VOLUME II.

SERMON VIII.

TIME and CHANCE.

ECCLESIASTES IX. II.

I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift,—nor the battle to the strong,—neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill,—but time and chance happeneth to them all.

WHEN a man casts a look upon this melancholy description of the world, and sees, contrary to all his guesses and expectations, what different fates attend the lives of men, —how oft it happens in the world, that there is not even bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, &c. —he is apt to conclude with a sigh upon it, —in the words, —though not in the sense of the wise man, —that time and chance happeneth to them all. —That time and chance, —apt seasons and fit conjunctures, have the greatest sway in the turns and disposals of men's fortunes: and that, as these

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lucky hints (as they are called) happens to be for, or against a man,—they either open the way to his advancement against all obstacles,---or block it up against all helps and attempts; that, as the text intimates, neither *wisdom*, nor *understanding*, nor *skill* shall be able to surmount them.

However widely we may differ in our reasonings upon this observation of Solomon's, the authority of the observation is strong beyond doubt, and the evidence given of it in all ages so alternately confirmed by examples and complaints, as to leave the fact itself unquestionable.---That things are carried on in this world, sometimes so contrary to all our reasonings, and the seeming probabilities of success,---that, even the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,---nay, what is stranger still---nor yet bread to the wise, who should last stand in want of it,---nor yet riches to men of understanding, who you would think best qualified to acquire them,---nor yet favour to men of skill, whose merit and pretences bid the fairest for it---but that there are some secret and unseen workings in human affairs, which baffle all our endeavours,---and turn aside the course of things in such a manner,——that the most likely causes disappoint and fail of producing for us the effect.

fect which we wished and naturally expected from them.

You will see a man, of whom, was you to form a conjecture from the appearance of things in his favour,——you would say was setting out in the world with the fairest prospect of making his fortune in it;——with all the advantages of birth to recommend him——of personal merit to speak for him,——and of friends to help and push him forwards: you will behold him, notwithstanding this, disappointed in every effect you might naturally have looked for, from them; every step he takes towards his advancement, something invisible shall pull him back, some unforeseen obstacle shall rise up perpetually in his way, and keep there.——In every application he makes,——some untoward circumstances shall blast it.——He shall rise early,——late take rest,——and eat the bread of carefulness,——yet some happier man shall still rise up, and ever step in before him, and leave him struggling to the end of his life, in the very same place in which he first begun it.

The history of a second, shall in all respects be the contrast to this. He shall come into the world with the most unpromising appearance,——shall set forwards without fortune, without friends,——without talents to procure him ei-

ther the one or the other. Nevertheless, you will see this clouded prospect brighten up insensibly, unaccountably before him; every thing presented in his way, shall turn out beyond his expectations,——in spite of that chain of unsurmountable difficulties which first threatened him,——time and chance shall open him a way, ——a series of successful occurrences shall lead him by the hand to the summit of honour and fortune, and, in a word, without giving him the pains of thinking, or the credit of projecting it, shall place him in safe possession of all that ambition could wish for.

The histories of the lives and fortunes of men are full of instances of this nature,--where favourable time, and lucky accidents, have done for them what wisdom or skill could not: and there is scarce any one who has lived long in the world, who, upon looking backwards, will not discover such a mixture of these in the many successful turns which have happened in his life, as to leave him very little reason to dispute against the fact, and, I should hope, as little upon the conclusions to be drawn from it.

Some, indeed, from a superficial view of this representation of things, have atheistically inferred,——that because there was so much of
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lottery in this life,—and mere casualty seemed to have such a share in the disposal of our affairs,—that the providence of God stood neuter and unconcerned in their several workings, leaving them to the mercy of time and chance, to be furthered or disappointed as such blind agents directed. Whereas in truth the very opposite conclusion follows. For consider, — —if a superior intelligent power did not sometime cross and over-rule events in this world——then our policies and designs in it, would always answer according to the wisdom and stratagem in which they were laid, and every cause, in the course of things, would produce its natural effect without variation. Now, as this is not the case, it necessarily follows, from Solomon's reasoning, that, if the race is not to the swift, if knowledge and learning do not always secure men from want,—nor care and industry always make men rich,—nor art and skill infallibly make men high in the world; that there is some other cause which mingles itself in human affairs, and governs and turns them as it pleases; which cause can be no other than the First Cause of all things, and the secret and over-ruling providence of that Almighty God, who, though his dwelling is so high, yet he humbleth himself to behold the

things that are done on earth, raising up the poor out of the dust, and lifting the beggars from the dunghill, and, contrary to all hopes, putting him with princes, even with the princes of his people; which, by the way, was the case of David, who makes the acknowledgment!—And no doubt—one reason, why God has selected to his own disposal so many instances as this, where events have run counter to all probabilities——was to give testimony to his providence in governing the world, and to engage us to a consideration and dependence upon it, for the event and success of our undertakings *. For undoubtedly—as I said,—it should seem but suitable to nature's law, that the race should ever be to the swift,—and the battle to the strong;——it is reasonable that the best contrivances and means should have best success.——and since it often falls out otherwise in the case of man, where the wisest projects are overthrown,——and the most hopeful means are blasted, and time and chance happen to all;—you must call in the Deity to untie this knot:—for though at sundry times—sundry events fall out,——which we, who look no further than the events themselves, call chance, because they fall out quite contrary both to our intentions and hopes,——

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* Vid. Tillotson's sermon on this subject.

yet, at the same time, in respect of God's providence over-ruling in these events, it were profane to call them chance, for they are pure designation, and though invisible, are still the regular dispensations of the superintending power of that Almighty Being, from whom all the laws and powers of nature are derived ;——who, as he has appointed,——so holds them as instruments in his hands ; and, without invading the liberty and free will of his creatures, can turn the passions and desires of their hearts to fulfill his own righteousness, and work such effects in human affairs, which to us seem merely *casual*,——but to him, certain and determined, and what his infinite wisdom sees necessary to be brought about, for the government and preservation of the world, over which providence perpetually presides.

When the sons of Jacob had cast their brother Joseph into the pit for his destruction,——one would think, if ever any incident which concerned the life of man deserved to be called chance, it was this,—that the company of Ishmaelites should happen to pass by, in that open country, at that very place, at that time too, when this barbarity was committed. After he was rescued by so favourable a contingency,——his life and future fortune still de-

pended upon a series of contingencies equally improbable; for instance, had the business of the Ishmaelites who bought him, carried them from Gilead, to any other part of the world besides Egypt; or, when they arrived there, had they sold their bond-slave to any other man but Potiphar, throughout the whole empire,—or, after that disposal, had the unjust accusation of his master's wife cast the youth into any other dungeon, than that where the King's prisoners were kept,—or had it fallen out at any other crisis, than when Pharaoh's chief butler was cast there too,—had this or any other of these events fallen out otherwise than it did,—a series of unmerited misfortunes had overwhelmed him, ---and, in consequence, the whole land of Egypt and Canaan. From the first opening to the conclusion of this long and interesting transaction, the providence of God suffered every thing to take its course: the malice and cruelty of Joseph's brethren, wrought their worst mischief against him;---banished him from his country and the protection of his parent.——The lust and baseness of a disappointed woman sunk him still deeper:——loaded his character with an unjust reproach,——and to, complete his ruin, doomed him, friendless, to the miseries of a hopeless prison, where he lay neglected.

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Providence, though it did not cross these events, —yet providence bent them to the most merciful ends. When the whole DRAMA was opened, then the wisdom and contrivances of every part of it was displayed. Then it appeared, it was not they (as the patriarch inferred in consolation of his brethren,) it was not they who sold him, but GOD,—’twas he sent him thither before them,—his superintending power availed itself of their passions——directed the operations of them,—held the chain in his hand, and turned and wound it to his own purpose. “Ye verily thought evil against me,—but GOD meant it for good,—ye had the guilt of a bad intention,—his providence the glory of accomplishing a good one,——by preserving *you a posterity upon the earth, and bringing to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive.*” All history is full of such testimonies, which though they may convince those who look no deeper than the surface of things, that time and chance happen to all,—yet to those who look deeper, they manifest at the same time, that there is a hand much busier in human affairs than what we vainly calculate; which, though the projectors of this world overlook,—or at least make no allowance for in the formation of their plans, they generally find it in the execution

tion of them. And though the fatalist may urge, that every event in this life is brought about by the ministry and chain of natural causes,—yet, in answer,—let him go one step higher—and consider,———whose power it is, that enables these causes to work,—whose knowledge it is that foresees what will be their effects,—whose goodness it is that is invisibly conducting them forwards to the best and greatest ends for the happiness of his creatures.

So that, as a great reasoner justly distinguishes upon this point,———“ It is not only religiously speaking, but with the strictest and most philosophical truth of expression, that the scripture tells us, *that God commanded the ravens; ———that they are his directions, which the winds and the seas obey.* If his servant hides himself by the brook, such an order of causes and effects shall be laid,—that the fowls of the air shall minister to his support.——When this resource fails, and his prophet is directed to go to Zerepha,——for that he has *commanded* a widow woman there to sustain him,—the same hand which leads the prophet to the gate of the city,—shall lead forth the distressed widow to the same place, to take him under her roof,—and, tho’ upon the impulse of a different occasion, shall nevertheless be made to fulfil his promise

promise and intention of their mutual preservation."

Thus much for the truth and illustration of this great and fundamental doctrine of a providence; the belief of which is of such consequence to us, as to be the great support and comfort of our lives.

Justly therefore might the psalmist, upon th declaration,—that the LORD is King,—conclude, that the earth may be glad therefore, yea the multitude of the isles may be glad therefore.

May GOD grant the persuasion may make us as virtuous, as it has reason to make us joyful; and that it may bring forth in us the fruits of good living to his praise and glory, to whom be all might, majesty and dominion, now and for evermore, *Amen.*

S E R M O N IX.

The Character of HEROD.

Preached on Innocents Day.

MATTHEW II. 17, 18.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,—In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachael weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

THE words which St. Matthew cites here as fulfilled by the cruelty and ambition of Herod,—are in the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, 15th verse. In the foregoing chapter, the prophet having declared God's intention of turning the mourning of his people into joy, by the restoration of the tribes which had been led away captive into Babylon; he proceeds, in the beginning of this chapter, which contains this prophecy, to give a more particular description of the great joy and festivity of that promised day, when they were to return once more to
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their own land, to enter upon their ancient possessions, and enjoy again all the priviledges they had lost, and, amongst others, and what was above them all,—the favour and protection of God, and the continuation of his mercies to them and their posterity.

To make, therefore, the impression of this change the stronger upon their minds——he gives a very pathetic representation of the preceding sorrow on that day when they were first led away captive.

Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Rama; lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachael weeping for her children, refused to be comforted, because they were not.

To enter into the full sense and beauty of this description, it is to be remembered, that the tomb of Rachael, Jacob's beloved wife, as we read in the 35th of Genesis, was situated near Rama, and betwixt that place and Bethlehem. Upon which circumstance the prophet raises one of the most affecting scenes that could be conceived; for as the tribes in their sorrowful journey betwixt Rama and Bethlehem in their way to Babylon, were supposed to pass by this monumental pillar of their ancestor Rachael, Jacob's wife, the prophet, by a common liberty in rhetoric, introduces her as rising up out of her

her sepulchre, and as the common mother of two of their tribes, weeping for her children, bewailing the sad catastrophe of her posterity led away into a strange land,——refusing to be comforted, because they were not,—lost and cut off from their country, and, in all likelihood, never to be restored back to her again.

The Jewish interpreters say upon this, that the patriarch Jacob buried Rachael in this very place, foreseeing by the spirit of prophecy, that his posterity should that way be led captive, that she might, as they passed her, intercede for them.——

But this fanciful superstructure upon the passage, seems to be little else than a mere dream of some of the Jewish doctors; and indeed had they not dreamed it when they did, 'tis great odds, but some of the Romish dreamers would have hit upon it before now. For as it favours the doctrine of intercessions—if there had not been undeniable vouchers for the real inventors of the conceit, one should much sooner have sought for it amongst the oral traditions of this church, than in the Talmud, where it is.——

But this by the bye. There is still another interpretation of the words here cited by St. Matthew, which altogether excludes this scenical

nical representation I have given of them.—
By which 'tis thought that the lamentation of Rachael, here described, has no immediate reference to Rachael, Jacob's wife; but that it simply alludes to the sorrows of her descendents, the distressed mothers of the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim who might accompany their children, led into captivity, as far as Rama, in their way to Babylon, who wept and wailed upon this sad occasion, and as the prophet describes them in the person of Rachael, refusing to be comforted for the loss of her children, looking upon their departure without hope or prospect of ever beholding a return.

Which-ever of the two senses you give the words of the prophet, the application of them by the evangelist is equally just and faithful. For as the former scene he relates was transacted upon the very same stage,—in the same district of Bethlehem near Rama——where so many mothers of the same tribe now suffered this second most affected blow——the words of Jeremiah, as the evangelist observes, were literally accomplished, and no doubt, in that horrid day, a voice was heard again in Rama, lamentation and bitter weeping——Rachael weeping for her children, and refused to be comforted;——every Bethlemitish mother involved

involved in this calamity, beholding it with hopeless sorrow——gave vent to it——each one bewailing her children, and lamenting the hardships of their lot, with the anguish of a heart as incapable of consolation, as they were of redress. Monster!——could no consideration of all this tender sorrow, stay thy hands?——Could no reflection upon so much bitter lamentation throughout the coasts of Bethlehem, interpose and plead in behalf of so many wretched objects, as this tragedy would make?——Was there no way open to ambition, but that thou must trample upon the affections of nature? Could no pity for the innocence of childhood——no sympathy for the earnings of parental love, incline thee to some other measures for thy security—but thou must thus pitilessly rush in——take the victim by violence——tear it from the embraces of the mother——offer it up before her eyes——leave her disconsolate for ever——broken-hearted with a loss——so affecting in itself——so circumstanced with horror, that no time, how friendly soever to the mournful——should ever be able to wear out the impression?

There is nothing in which the mind of man is more divided than in the accounts of this horrid nature.——For when we consider man, as fashioned by his Maker——innocent and upright

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right—full of the tenderest dispositions—with a heart inclining him to kindness, and the love and protection of his species—this idea of him would almost shake the credit of such accounts; —so that to clear them—we are forced to take a second view of man—very different from this favourable one, in which we insensibly represent him to our imaginations—that is—we are obliged to consider him—not as he was made——but as he is——a creature by the violence and irregularity of his passions capable of being perverted from all these friendly and benevolent propensities, and sometimes hurried into excesses so opposite to them, as to render the most unnatural and horrid accounts of what he does but too probable.—The truth of this observation will be exemplified in the case before us. For next to the faith and character of the historian who reports such facts,—the particular character of the person who committed them is to be considered as a voucher for their truth and credibility;—and if, upon enquiry, it appears that the man acted but consistent with himself,—and just so as you would have expected from his principles,—the credit of the historian is restored,—and the fact related stands incontestable,

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from so strong and concurring an evidence on its side —

With this view, it may not be an unacceptable application of the remaining part of a discourse upon this day, to give you a sketch of the character of Herod, not as drawn from scripture,—for, in general, it furnishes us with few materials for such descriptions:—the sacred scripture cuts off in few words the history of the ungodly, how great soever they were in the eyes of the world,—and, on the other hand, dwells largely upon the smallest actions of the righteous——We find all the circumstances of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, recorded in the minutest manner.——The wicked seem only mentioned with regret; just brought upon the stage, on purpose to be condemned. The use and advantage of which conduct—is, I suppose, the reason—as in general it enlarges on no character, but what is worthy of imitation. 'Tis however undeniable, that the lives of bad men are not without use;—and whenever such a one is drawn, not with a corrupt view to be admired,—but on purpose to be detested,—it must excite such an horror against vice, as will strike indirectly the same good impression. And though it is painful in the last degree to paint a man in the shades which

which his vices have cast upon him,—yet when it serves this end, and at the same time illustrates a point in sacred history—it carries its own excuse with it.

This Herod, therefore, of whom the evangelist speaks, if you take a superficial view of his life, you would say was a compound of good and evil ;——that though he was certainly a bad man,—yet you would think the mass was tempered at the same time with a mixture of good qualities. So that, in course, as is not uncommon, he would appear with two characters very different from each other. If you looked upon the more favourable side, you would see a man of great address—popular in his behaviour,—generous, prince-like in his entertainments and expences, and, in a word, set off with all such virtue and shewy properties, as bid high for the countenance and approbation of the world. —View him in another light, he was an ambitious, designing man,——suspicious of all the world,—rapacious,—implacable in his temper, without sense of religion,—or feeling of humanity.——Now, in all such complex characters as this,—the way the world usually judges, is—to sum up the good and the bad against each other,—deduct the lesser of these articles from the greater, and (as we do in passing
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other accounts) give credit to the man for what remains upon the balance. Now, tho' this seems a fair,——yet I fear 'tis often a fallacious reckoning,——which, tho' it may serve in many ordinary cases of private life, yet will not hold good in the more notorious instances of men's lives, especially when so complicated with good and bad, as to exceed all common bounds and proportion. Not to be deceived in such cases, we must work by a different rule, which, tho' it may appear less candid,——yet, to make amends, I am persuaded will bring us in general much nearer to the things we want,---which is truth. The way to which is——in all judgments of this kind, to distinguish and carry in your eye the principal and ruling passion which leads the character---and separate that from the other parts of it,——and then take notice, how far his other qualities, good and bad, are brought to serve and support that. For want of this distinction,---we often think ourselves inconsistent creatures, when we are the furthest from it, and all the variety of shapes and contradictory appearances we put on, are, in truth, but so many different attempts to gratify the same governing appetite.——

With this clew, let us endeavour to unravel this character of Herod, as here given.

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The first thing which strikes one in it, is ambition, an immoderate thirst, as well as jealousy of power;—how inconsistent soever in other parts, his character appears invariable in this, and every action of his life was true to it.—From hence we may venture to conclude, that this was *his* ruling passion,---and that most, if not all the other wheels were put in motion by this first spring. Now let us consider how far this was the case in fact.

To begin with the worst part of him,—I said he was a man of no sense of religion, or at least no other sense of it, but that which served his turn—for he is recorded to have built temples in Judea, and erected images in them for idolatrous worship,—not from a persuasion of doing right, for he was bred a Jew, and consequently taught to abhor all idolatry,—but he was in truth sacrificing all this time to a greater idol of his own, his ruling passion; for if we may trust Josephus, his sole view in so gross a compliance was to ingratiate himself with Augustus and the great men of Rome from whom he held his power.---With this he was greedy and rapacious---how could he be otherwise, with so devouring an appetite as ambition to provide for?---He was jealous in his nature, and suspicious of all the world.---Shew me an ambitious man that

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is not so; for as such a man's hand, like Ishmael's, is against every man, he concludes that every man's hand in course is against him.

Few men were ever guilty of more astonishing acts of cruelty—and yet the particular instances of them in Herod were such as he was hurried into, by the alarms this waking passion perpetually gave him. He put the whole Sanadrim to the sword---sparing neither age, or wisdom, or merit---one cannot suppose, simply from an inclination to cruelty---no---they had opposed the establishment of his power at Jerusalem.

His own sons, two hopeful youths, he cut off by a public execution.---The worst men have natural affection---and such a stroke as this would run so contrary to the natural workings of it, that you are forced to suppose the impulse of some more violent inclination to over-rule and conquer it. And so it was; for the Jewish historian tells us, 'twas jealousy of power,---his darling object---of which he feared they would one day or other dispossess him---sufficient inducement to transport a man of such a temper into the bloodiest excesses.

Thus far this one fatal and extravagant passion, accounts for the dark side of Herod's character. This governing principle being first laid open

open—all his other bad actions follow in course, like so many symptomatick complaints from the same distemper.

Let us see, if this was not the case even of his virtues too.

At first sight it seems a mystery—how a man, so black as Herod has been thus far described——should be able to support himself in the favour and friendship of so wise and penetrating a body of men, as the Roman senate, of whom he held his power. To counter-balance the weight of so bad and detested a character—and be able to bear it up, as Herod did, one would think he must have been master of some great secret worth enquiring after—he was so. But that secret was no other than what appears on this reverse of his character. He was a person of great address—popular in his outward behaviour—he was generous, prince-like in his entertainments and expences. The world was then as corrupt, at least, as now—and Herod understood it—knew at what price it was to be bought—and what qualities would bid the highest for its good word and approbation.

And in truth, he judged this matter so well,——that notwithstanding the general odium and prepossession which arose against so hateful

a character—in spite of all the ill impressions from so many repeated complaints of his cruelties and oppressions—he yet stemmed the torrent—and by the specious display of these popular virtues bore himself up against it all his life. So that at length, when he was summoned to Rome to answer for his crimes---Josephus tells us---that by the mere magnificence of his expences---and the apparent generosity of his behaviour, he entirely confuted the whole charge --and so ingratiated himself with the Roman senate---and won the heart of Augustus---(as he had that of Anthony before) that he ever after had his favour and kindness; which I cannot mention without adding---that it is an eternal stain upon the character and memory of Augustus, that he sold his countenance and protection to so bad a man, for so mean and base a consideration.

From this point of view, if we look back upon Herod---his best qualities will shrink into little room, and how glittering soever in appearance, when brought to this balance, are found wanting. And in truth if we would not willingly be deceived in the value of any virtue, or set of virtues in so complex a character—we must call them to this very account; examine whom they serve, what passion and what principle

ple they have for their master. When this is understood, the whole clew is unraveled at once, and the character of Herod, as complicated as it is given us in history—when thus analysed, is summed up in three words—*That he was a man of unbounded ambition, who stuck at nothing to gratify it;*—so that not only his vices were ministerial to his ruling passion, but his virtues too (if they deserve the name) were drawn in, and lifted into the same service.

Thus much for the character of Herod—the critical review of which has many obvious uses, to which I may trust you, having time but to mention that particular one which first led me into this examination, namely, that all objections against the evangelist's account of this day's slaughter of the Bethlehemish infants—from the incredibility of so horrid an account—are silenced by this account of the man; since in this he acted but like himself, and just so as you would expect in the same circumstances, from every man of so ambitious a head—and so bad a heart.—Consider, what havocks ambition has made—how often the same tragedy has been acted upon larger theatres—where not only the innocence of childhood—or the grey hairs of the aged, have found no protection—but whole countries without distinc-

tion have been put to the sword; or, what is as cruel, have been driven forth to nakedness and famine, to make way for new ones, under the guidance of this passion.——For a specimen of this, reflect upon the story related by Plutarch:——when by order of the Roman senate, seventy populous cities were unawares sacked and destroyed at one prefixed hour, by P. Æmilius—by whom one hundred and fifty thousand unhappy people were driven in one day into captivity—to be sold to the highest bidder, to end their days in cruel labour and anguish. As astonishing as the account before us is, it vanishes into nothing from such views, since it is plain from all history, that there is no wickedness too great for so unbounded a cause, and that the most horrid accounts in history are, as I said above, but too probable effects of it.

May God of his mercy defend mankind from future experiments of this kind——and grant we may make a proper use of them, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, *Amen.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N X.

JOB's Account of the Shortness and Troubles of Life, considered.

JOB XIV. 1, 2.

Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble:—He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

THERE is something in this reflection of holy Job's, upon the shortness of life, and instability of human affairs, so beautiful and truly sublime, that one might challenge the writings of the most celebrated orators of antiquity, to produce a specimen of eloquence, so noble and thoroughly affecting. Whether this effect be owing, in some measure, to the pathetic nature of the subject reflected on;—or to the eastern manner of expression, in a style more exalted and suitable to so great a subject, or (which is the more likely account) because they are properly the words of that Being, who first inspired man with language, and taught his mouth to utter, who opened the lips of the

dumb, and made the tongue of the infant eloquent;—to which of these we are to refer the beauty and sublimity of this, as well as that of numberless other passages in holy writ, may not seem now material; but surely, without these helps, never man was better qualified to make just and noble reflections upon the shortness of human life, and instability of human affairs, than Job was, who had himself waded through such a sea of troubles, and in his passage had encountered many vicissitudes of storms and sunshine, and by turns had felt both the extremes, of all the happiness, and all the wretchedness that mortal man is heir to.

The beginning of his days was crowned with every thing that ambition could wish for;—he was the greatest of all the men of the East, —had large and unbounded possessions, and no doubt enjoyed all the comforts and advantages of life, which they could administer.—Perhaps you will say, a wise man might not be inclined to give a full loose to this kind of happiness, without some better security for the support of it, than the mere possession of such goods of fortune which often slip from under us, and sometimes unaccountably make themselves wings, and fly away.—But he had that security too;—for the hand of providence, which had

had thus far protected, was still leading him forwards, and seemed engaged in the preservation and continuance of these blessings;—God had set a hedge about him, and about all that he had on every side; he had blessed all the works of his hands, and his substance increased every day. Indeed, even with this security, riches to him who hath *neither child nor brother*, as the wise man observes, instead of a comfort, prove sometimes a sore travel and vexation.—The mind of man is not always satisfied with the reasonable assurance of its own enjoyments, but will look forwards, and if it discovers some imaginary void, the want of some beloved object to fill his place after him, will often disquiet itself in vain, and say——“For whom do I labour, and beave myself of rest?”

This bar to his happiness God had likewise taken away, in blessing him with a numerous offspring of sons and daughters, the apparent inheritance of all his present happiness.—Pleasing reflection! to think the blessings God has indulged one's self in, shall be handed and continued down to a man's own seed: how little does this differ from a second enjoyment of them, to an affectionate parent? who naturally looks forward with as strong an interest upon

his children, as if he was to live over again in his own posterity.

What could be wanting to finish such a picture of a happy man?——Surely nothing, except a virtuous disposition to give a relish to these blessings, and direct him to make a proper use of them.——He had that too, for he was a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil.

In the midst of all this prosperity, which was as great as could well fall to the share of one man;——whilst all the world looked gay, and smiled upon him, and every thing round him seemed to promise, if possible, an increase of happiness, in one instant all is changed into sorrow and utter despair.——

It pleases God, for wise purposes, to blast the fortune of his house, and cut off the hopes of his posterity, and, in one mournful day, to bring this great prince from his palace down to the dunghill. His flocks and herds, in which consisted the abundance of his wealth, were part consumed by a fire from heaven, the remainder taken away by the sword of the enemy: his sons and daughters, whom 'tis natural to imagine so good a man had so brought up in a sense of their duty, as to give him all reasonable hopes of much joy and pleasure in their future

ture lives;——natural prospect for a parent to look forwards at, to recompence him for the many cares and anxieties which their infancy had cost him! these dear pledges of his future happiness were all, all snatched from him at one blow, just at the time that one might imagine they were beginning to be the comfort and delight of his old age, which most wanted such staves to lean on:—and as circumstances add to an evil, so they did to this;——for it fell out not only by a very calamitous accident, which was grievous enough in itself, but likewise upon the back of his other misfortunes, when he was ill prepared to bear such a shock; and what would still add to it, it happened at an hour when he had least reason to expect it, when he would naturally think his children secure and out of the way of danger. “For whilst they were feasting and making merry in their eldest brother’s house, a great wind out of the wilderness smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon them.”

Such a concurrence of misfortunes are not the common lot of many: and yet there are instances of some who have undergone as severe trials, and bravely struggled under them; perhaps by natural force of spirits, the advantages of health, and the cordial assistance of a friend. And with

these helps, what may not a man sustain?—But this was not Job's case; for scarce had these evils fallen upon him, when he was not only borne down with a grievous distemper, which afflicted him from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, but likewise his three friends, in whose kind consolations he might have found a medicine,—even the wife of his bosom, whose duty it was, with a gentle hand, to have softened all his sorrows, instead of doing this, they cruelly insulted and became the reproachers of his integrity. O God! what is man when thou thus bruise him, and makest his burthen heavier as his strength grows less?——Who, that had found himself thus an example of the many changes and chances of this mortal life;——when he considered himself now stripped and left destitute of so many valuable blessings which the moment before thy providence had poured upon his head;—when he reflected upon this gay delightful structure, in appearance so strongly built, so pleasingly surrounded with every thing that could flatter his hopes and wishes, and beheld it all levelled with the ground in one moment, and the whole prospect vanish with it like the description of an enchantment;——who, I say, that had seen and felt the shock of so sudden a revolution, would not have
been

been furnished with just and beautiful reflections upon the occasion? and said with Job in the words of the text, "That man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of misery; —that he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not."

The words of the text are an epitome of the *natural* and *moral* vanity of man, and contain two distinct declarations concerning his state and condition in each respect.

First, that he is a creature of few days; and, secondly, that those days are full of trouble.

I shall make some reflections upon each of these in their order, and conclude with a practical lesson from the whole.

And, first, that he is of few days. The comparison which Job makes use of, That man cometh forth like a flower, is extremely beautiful, and more to the purpose than the most elaborate proof, which, in truth, the subject will not easily admit of;—the shortness of life being a point so generally complained of in all ages since the flood, and so universally felt and acknowledged by the whole species, as to require no evidence beyond a similitude; the intent of which is not so much to prove the fact, as to illustrate and place it in such a light as to strike

strike us, and bring the impressi^on home to ourselves in a more affecting manner.

Man comes forth, says Job, like a flower, and is cut down ;——he is sent into the world the fairest and noblest part of God's works,—fashioned after the image of his Creator, with respect to reason and the great faculties of the mind ; he cometh forth glorious as the flower of the field ; as it surpasses the vegetable world in beauty, so does he the animal world in the glory and excellency of his nature.

The one——if no untimely accident oppress it, soon arrives at the full period of its perfection,—is suffered to triumph for a few moments, and is plucked up by the roots in the very pride and gayest stage of its being :——or if it happens to escape the hands of violence, in a few days it necessarily sickens of itself, and dies away.

Man is likewise, though his progress is slower, and his duration something longer, yet the periods of his growth and declensions are nearly the same, both in the nature and manner of them.

If he escapes the dangers which threaten his tenderer years, he is soon got into the full maturity and strength of life ; and if he is so fortunate as not to be hurried out of it then by accidents,

accidents, by his own folly and intemperance— if he escapes these, he naturally decays of himself;—a period comes fast upon him, beyond which he was not made to last.—Like a flower or fruit which may be plucked up by force before the time of their maturity, yet cannot be made to outgrow the period when they are to fade and drop of themselves; when that comes, the hand of nature then plucks them both off, and no art of the botanist can uphold the one, or skill of the physician preserve the other, beyond the periods to which their original frames and constitutions were made to extend. As God has appointed and determined the several growths and decays of the vegetable race, so he seems as evidently to have prescribed the same laws to man, as well as all living creatures, in the first rudiments of which, there are contained the specific powers of their growth, duration and extinction; and when the evolutions of those animal powers are exhausted and run down, the creature expires and dies of itself, as ripe fruit falls from the tree, or a flower preserved beyond its bloom, drops and perishes upon the stalk.

Thus much for this comparison of Job's, which, though it is very poetical, yet conveys a just idea of the thing referred to.—“That he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not,”

—is,

—is no less a faithful and fine representation of the shortness and vanity of human life, of which one cannot give a better explanation, than by referring to the original, from whence the picture was taken.——With how quick a succession do days, months and years pass over our heads?—how truly like a shadow that departeth do they flee away insensibly; and scarce leave an impression with us?—when we endeavour to call them back by reflection, and consider in what manner they have gone, how unable are the best of us to give a tolerable account?——and were it not for some of the more remarkable stages which have distinguished a few periods of this rapid progress—we should look back upon it all as Nebuchadnezzar did upon his dream when he awoke in the morning;——he was sensible many things had passed, and troubled him too; but had passed on so quickly, they had left no footsteps behind, by which he could be enabled to trace them back.—Melancholy account of the life of man! which generally runs on in such a manner, as scarce to allow time to make reflections which way it has gone.

How many of our first years slide by in the innocent sports of childhood, in which we are not able to make reflections upon them?——

how

how many more thoughtless years escape us in our youth, when we are unwilling to do it, and are so eager in the pursuits of pleasure as to have no time to spare, to stop and consider them!

When graver and riper years come on, and we begin to think it time to reform and set up for men of sense and conduct, then the business and perplexing interests of this world, and the endless plotting and contriving how to make the most of it; do so wholly employ us, that we are too busy to make reflections upon so unprofitable a subject.——As families and children encrease, so do our affections, and with them are multiplied our cares and toils for their preservation and establishment; ——all which take up our thoughts so closely, and possess them so long, that we are often overtaken by grey hairs before we see them, or have found leisure to consider how far we were got,—what we have been doing,—and for what purpose God sent us into the world. As man may justly be said to be of few days, considered with respect to this hasty succession of things, which soon carries him into the decline of his life, so may he likewise be said to flee like a shadow and continue not, when his duration is compared with other parts of God's works, and even the works of his own hands.

hands, which outlast him many generations;
——whilst, as Homer observes, like leaves,
one generation drops, and another springs up to
fall again and be forgotten.

But when we further consider his days in the
light in which we ought chiefly to view them,
as they appear in thy sight, O GOD! with whom
a thousand years are but as yesterday; when
we reflect that this hand-breadth of life is all
that is measured out to us from that eternity for
which is created, how does his short span va-
nish to nothing in the comparison? 'Tis true,
the greatest portion of time will do the same
when compared with what is to come; and
therefore so short and transitory a one, as three-
score years and ten, beyond which all is decla-
red to be labour and sorrow, may the easier be
allowed: and yet how uncertain are we of that
portion, short as it is? Do not ten thousand acci-
dents break off the tender thread of human
life, long before it can be drawn out to that
extent?——The new-born babe falls down an
easy prey, and moulders back again into dust,
like a tender blossom put forth in an untimely
hour.——The hopeful youth in the very pride
and beauty of life is cut off, some cruel distem-
per or unthought of accident lays him prostrate
upon the earth, to pursue Job's comparison, like
a bloom-

a blooming flower smit and shrivelled up with a malignant blast.—In this stage of life chances multiply upon us,—the seeds of disorders are sown by intemperance or neglect,—infectious distempers are more easily contracted, when contracted they rage with greater violence, and the success in many cases is more doubtful, in-somuch that they who have exercised themselves in computations of this kind tell us, “ That one half of the whole species which are born into the world, go out of it again, and are all dead in so short a space as the first seventeen years.”

These reflections may be sufficient to illustrate the first part of Job’s declaration, “ *That man is of few days.*” Let us examine the truth of the other, and see, whether he is not likewise full of trouble.

And here we must not take our account from the flattering outside of things, which are generally set off with a glittering appearance enough, especially in what is called *higher life*.—Nor can we safely trust the evidence of some of the more merry and thoughtless amongst us, who are so set upon the enjoyment of life, as seldom to reflect upon the troubles of it ;——or who, perhaps, because they are not yet come to this portion of their inheritance, imagine it is not their common lot.——Nor, lastly, are we to form

form an idea of it, from the delusive stories of a few of the most prosperous passengers, who have fortunately sailed through and escaped the rougher toils and distresses. But we are to take our account from a close survey of human life, and the real face of things, stripped of every thing that can palliate or gild it over. We must hear the general complaint of all ages, and read the histories of mankind. If we look into them, and examine them to the bottom, what do they contain but the history of sad and uncomfortable passages, which a good-natured man cannot read but with oppression of spirits. — Consider the dreadful succession of wars in one part or other of the earth, perpetuated from one century to another with so little intermission, that mankind have scarce had time to breathe from them, since ambition first came into the world; consider the horrid effects of them in all those barbarous devastations we read of, where whole nations have been put to the sword, or have been driven out to nakedness and famine to make room for new-comers. — Consider how great a part of our species in all ages down to this, have been trod under the feet of cruel and capricious tyrants, who would neither hear their cries, nor pity their distresses. — Consider slavery, — what it is, — how bitter a draught, and how many

many millions have been made to drink of it;— which, if it can poison all earthly happiness when exercised barely upon our bodies, what must it be, when it comprehends both the slavery of body and mind?—To conceive this, look into the history of the Romish church and her tyrants, (or rather executioners, who seem to have taken pleasure in the pangs and convulsions of their fellow creatures.——Examine the inquisition, hear the melancholy notes founded in every cell.—Consider the anguish of mock trials, and the exquisite tortures consequent thereupon, mercilessly inflicted upon the unfortunate, where the racked and weary soul has so often wished to take its leave,—but cruelly not suffered to depart.——Consider how many of these helpless wretches have been haled from thence in all periods of this tyranic usurpation, to undergo the massacres and flames to which a false and a bloody religion has condemned them.

If this sad history and detail of the more public causes of the miseries of man are not sufficient, let us behold him in another light, with respect to the more private causes of them, and see whether he is not full of trouble likewise there, and almost born to it as naturally as the sparks fly upwards. If we consider man as a
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creature full of wants and necessities (whether real or imaginary) which he is not able to supply of himself, what a train of disappointments, vexations and dependencies are to be seen, issuing from thence to perplex and make his being uneasy?—How many justlings and hard struggles do we undergo, in making our way in the world?—How barbarously held back?—How often and basely overthrown, in aiming only at getting bread?—How many of us never attain it—at least not comfortably,—but from various and unknown causes—eat it all their lives long in bitterness?

If we shift the scene, and look upwards, towards those whose situation in life seems to place them above the sorrows of this kind, yet where are they exempt from others? Do not all ranks and conditions of men meet with sad accidents, and numberless calamities in other respects, which often make them go heavily all their lives long?

How many fall into chronical infirmities, which render both their days and nights restless and insupportable?—How many of the highest rank are tore up with ambition, or soured with disappointments; and how many more, from a thousand secret causes of disquiet, pine away in silence, and owe their deaths to sorrows

sorrows and dejection of heart?—If we cast our eyes upon the lowest class and condition of life,—the scene is more melancholy still.——

Millions of our fellow-creatures, born to no inheritance but poverty and trouble, forced by the necessity of their lots to drudgery and painful employments, and hard set with that too, to get enough to keep themselves and families alive.

——So that, upon the whole, when we have examined the true state and condition of human life, and have made some allowances for a few fugacious, deceitful pleasures, there is scarce any thing to be found which contradicts Job's description of it.——Which ever way we look abroad, we see some legible characters of what God first denounced against us, “That in sorrow we should eat our bread, till we return to the ground, from whence we were taken.”†.

But some one will say, Why are we thus to be put out of love with human life? To what purpose is it to expose the dark sides of it to us, or enlarge upon the infirmities which are natural, and consequently out of our power to redress?

I answer, that the subject is nevertheless of great importance, since it is necessary every
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† N. B. Most of these reflections upon the miseries of life are taken from Woollaston.

creature should understand his present state and condition, to put him in mind of behaving suitably to it.——Does not an impartial survey of man—the holding up this glass to shew him his defects and natural infirmities, naturally tend to cure his pride, and cloath him with humility, which is a dress that best becomes a short-lived and a wretched creature?——Does not the consideration of the shortness of our life, convince us of the wisdom of dedicating so small a portion to the great purposes of eternity?

Lastly, When we reflect that this span of life, short as it is, is chequered with so many troubles, that there is nothing in this world springs up, or can be enjoyed without a mixture of sorrow, how insensibly does it incline us to turn our eyes and affections from so gloomy a prospect, and fix them upon that happier country, where afflictions cannot follow us, and where God will wipe away all tears from off our faces, for ever and ever? *Amen.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XI.

EVIL-SPEAKING.

JAMES I. 26.

*If any man among you seem to be religious, and
bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own
heart, that man's religion is vain.*

OF the many duties owing both to God and our neighbour, there are scarce any men so bad; as not to acquaint themselves of some, and few so good, I fear; as to practise all.

Every man seems willing enough to compound the matter, and adopt so much of the system, as will least interfere with his principal and ruling passion; and for those parts, which would occasion a more troublesome opposition, to consider them as hard sayings, and so leave them for those to practise whose natural tempers are better suited for the struggle. So that a man shall be covetous, oppressive, revengeful, neither a lover of truth, or common honesty, and yet, at the same time, shall be *very* religious, and so sanctified, as not once to fail of paying his
morning

morning and evening sacrifice to GOD. So, on the other hand, a man shall live without GOD in the world, have neither any great sense of religion, or indeed pretend to have any, and yet be of nicest honour, conscientiously just and fair in all his dealings. And here it is that men generally betray themselves, deceiving, as the apostle says, their own hearts; of which the instances are so various, in one degree or other throughout human life, that one might safely say, the bulk of mankind live in such a contradiction to themselves, that there is no character so hard to be met with as one which, upon a critical examination, will appear altogether uniform, and in every point consistent with itself.

If such a contrast was only observeable in the different stages of a man's life, it would cease to be either a matter of wonder, or of just reproach. Age, experience, and much reflection, may naturally enough be supposed to alter a man's sense of things, and so entirely to transform him, that not only in outward appearances, but in the very cast and turn of his mind, he may be as unlike and different from the man he was twenty or thirty years ago, as he ever was from any thing of his own species. This, I say, is naturally to be accounted for, and in some cases might be praise-worthy too: but the obser-
vati-

vation is to be made of men in the same period of their lives, that in the same day, sometimes in the very same action, they are utterly inconsistent and irreconcilable with themselves.—

Look at a man in one light, and he shall seem wise, penetrating, discreet, and brave: behold him in another point of view, and you see a creature all over folly and indiscretion, weak and timorous, as cowardice and indiscretion can make him. A man shall appear gentle, courteous, and benevolent to all mankind; follow him into his own house, may be you see a tyrant, morose and savage to all whose happiness depends upon his kindness. A third, in his general behaviour, is found to be generous, disinterested, humane and friendly;—hear but the sad story of the friendless orphans, too credulously trusting all their little substance into his hands, and he shall appear more sordid, more pitiless and unjust, than the injured themselves have bitterness to paint him. Another shall be charitable to the poor, uncharitable in his censures and opinions of all the rest of the world besides;—temperate in his appetites, intemperate in his tongue; shall have too much conscience and religion to cheat the man who trusts him, and perhaps, as far as the business of debtor and creditor extends, shall be just and scrupulous to the

uttermoſt mite: yet in matter of full as great concern, where he is to have the handling of the parties reputation and good name,—the deareſt, the tenderſt property the man has, he will do him irreparable damage, and rob him there without meaſure or pity,——

And this ſeems to be that particular piece of inconfiſtency and contradiction which the text is levelled at; in which the words ſeem ſo pointed, as if St James had known more flagrant inſtances of this kind of deluſion than what had fallen under the obſervation of any of the reſt of the apoſtles; he being more remarkably vehement and copious upon that ſubject than any other.

Doubtleſs ſome of his converts had been notoriously wicked and licentious, in this remorseleſs practice of defamation and evil-speaking. Perhaps the only man, tho' ſpotleſs as an angel, (for no character is too ſacred for calumny to blacken), had grievouſly ſuffered himſelf, and, as his bleſſed Maſter foretold him, had been cruelly reviled, and evil *ſpoken of*.

All his labours in the goſpel, his unaffected and perpetual ſolicitude for the preſervation of his flock, his watchings, his faſtings, his poverty, his natural ſimplicity and innocence of life, *all* perhaps were not enough to defend him from

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from this unruly weapon, so full of deadly poison. And what in all likelihood might move his sorrow and indignation more, some who seemed the most devout and zealous of all his converts, were the most merciless and uncharitable in that respect; having a form of godliness, full of bitter envyings and strife.

With such it is that he expostulates so largely in the third chapter of this epistle; and there is something in this vivacity, tempered with such affection and concern, as well suited the character of an inspired man. My brethren, says the apostle, these things ought not to be.—— The wisdom that is from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, without partiality, without hypocrisy. The wisdom from above,—— that heavenly religion which I have preached to you, is pure, alike and consistent with itself in all its parts; like its great Author, 'tis universally kind and benevolent in all cases and circumstances. Its first glad tidings were peace upon earth, good will towards men; its chief corner-stone, its most distinguishing character, is love, that kind principle which brought it down, in the pure exercise of which consists the chief enjoyment of heaven from whence it came. But this practice, my brethren, cometh not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish, full of

confusion and every evil work. Reflect then a moment; can a fountain send forth, at the same place, sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries, either a vine, figs? Lay your hands upon your hearts, and let your consciences speak.—Ought not the same just principle which restrains you from cruelty and wrong in one case, equally to withhold you from it in another?—Should not charity and good will, like the principle of life, circulating through the smallest vessels in every member, ought it not to operate as regularly upon you, throughout, as well upon your words, as upon your actions?

If a man is wise and endued with knowledge, let him shew it, out of a good conversation, with meekness of wisdom. But—If any man amongst you seemeth to be religious—seemeth to be,—for truly religious he cannot be,—and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.—This is the full force of St James's reasoning; upon which I have dwelt the more, it being the foundation upon which is grounded this clear decision of the matter left us in the text. In which the apostle seems to have set the two characters of a saint and a slanderer at such variance, that one would have thought they could never have had
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a heart to have met together again. But there are no alliances too strange for this world.— How many may we observe every day, even of the gentle sex, as well as our own, who, without conviction of doing much wrong, in the midst of a full career of calumny and defamation, rise up punctual at the stated hour of prayer, leave the cruel story half untold till they return, —go, —and kneel down before the throne of heaven, thank God that he had not made them like others, and that his Holy Spirit had enabled them to perform the duties of the day, in so Christian and conscientious a manner!

This delusive itch for slander, too common in all ranks of people, whether to gratify a little ungenerous resentment; —whether oftener out of a principle of levelling, from a narrowness and poverty of soul, ever impatient of merit and superiority in others; whether a mean ambition, or the insatiate lust of being witty, (a talent in which ill-nature and malice are no ingredients); —or, lastly, whether from a natural cruelty of disposition, abstracted from all views and considerations of self: to which one, or whether to all jointly, we are indebted for this contagious malady; thus much is certain, from whatever seeds it springs, the growth and progress of it are as destructive to, as they are

unbecoming a civilized people: To pass a hard and ill-natured reflection, upon an undesigning action; to invent, or, which is equally bad, to propagate a vexatious report, without colour and grounds; to plunder an innocent man of his character and good name, a jewel which perhaps he has starved himself to purchase, and probably would hazard his life to secure; to rob him at the same time of his happiness and peace of mind; perhaps his bread,—the bread, may be, of a virtuous family; and all this, as Solomon says of the madman, who casteth fire-brands, arrows and death, and faith, Am I not in sport? all this, out of wantonness, and oftner from worse motives; the whole appears such a complication of badness, as requires no words or warmth of fancy to aggravate: Pride, treachery, envy, hypocrisy, malice, cruelty and self-love, may have been said, in one shape or other, to have occasioned all the frauds and mischiefs that ever happened in the world: but the chances against a coincidence of them all in one person are so many, that one would have supposed the character of a common slanderer as rare and difficult a production in nature, as that of a great genius, which seldom happens above once in an age.

But whatever was the case, when St James wrote his epistle, we have been very successful in latter days, and have found out the art, by a proper management of light and shade, to compound all these vices together, so as to give body and strength to the whole, whilst no one but a discerning artist is able to discover the labours that join in finishing the picture.—And, indeed, like many other bad originals in the world,—it stands in need of all the disguise it has.—For who could be enamoured of a character, made up of so loathsome a compound,—could they behold it naked,—in its crooked and deformed shape,—with all its natural and detested infirmities laid open to public view?

And therefore, it were to be wished, that one could do in this malignant case of the mind—what is generally done for the public good, in the more malignant and epidemical cases of the body,—that is,—when they are found infectious,—to write a history of the distemper,—and ascertain all the symptoms of the malady, so that every one might know, whom he might venture to go near, with tolerable safety to himself.—But, alas! the symptoms of this appear in so many strange and contradictory shapes, and vary so wonderfully with the temper and habit of the patient, that they are not to be

classed,——or reduced to any one regular system.

Ten thousand are the vehicles in which this deadly poison is prepared and communicated to the world ;—and by some artful hands, 'tis done by so subtle and nice an infusion, that it is not to be ~~tasted~~ or discovered, but by its effects.

How frequently is the honesty and integrity of a man disposed of, by a smile or a shrug?—How many good and generous actions have been sunk into oblivion, by a distrustful look,—or stamp't with the imputation of proceeding from bad motives, by a mysterious and seasonable whisper?

Look into companies of those whose gentle natures should disarm them,—we shall find no better account.——How large a portion of chastity is sent out of the world by distant hints,—nodded away, and cruelly winked into suspicion, by the envy of those, who are pass'd all temptation of it themselves!——How often does the reputation of a helpless creature bleed by a report—which the party, who is at the pains to propagate it, beholds with much pity and fellow-feeling,—that she is heartily sorry for it,—hopes in God it is not true;—however, as Archbishop Tillotson wittily observes upon it, is
resolved

resolved, in the mean time, to give the report her pass, that at least it may have fair play to take its fortune in the world,—to be believed or not, according to the charity of those, into whose hands it shall happen to fall?

So fruitful is this vice in variety of expedients, to satiate as well as disguise itself. But if these smoother weapons cut so sore,—what shall we say of open and unblushing scandal—subjected to no caution,—tied down to no restraints?—If the one, like an arrow shot in the dark, does nevertheless so much secret mischief,—this, like the pestilence, which rageth at noon day, sweeps all before it, levelling without distinction the good and the bad; a thousand fall beside it, and ten thousand on its right hand,—they fall,——so rent and torn in this tender part of them, so unmercifully butchered, as sometimes never to recover either wounds,——or the anguish of heart,——which they have occasioned.—

But there is nothing so bad which will not admit of something to be said in its defence.

And here it may be asked, —Whether the inconveniences and ill effects which the world feels,—from the licentiousness of this practice—are not sufficiently counterbalanced by the real influence it has upon mens lives and con-

duct?—That if there was no evil speaking in the world, thousands would be encouraged to do ill,—and would rush into many indecorums, like a horse into the battle,—were they sure to escape the tongue of men.

That if we take a general view of the world, —we shall find, that a great deal of virtue, —at least of the outward appearance of it; —is not so much from any fixed principle, as the terror of what the world will say,—and the liberty it will take upon the occasions we shall give.

That if we descend to particulars, numbers are every day taking more pains to be well spoken of,—than what would actually enable them to live so as to deserve it.

That there are many of both sexes who can support life well enough without honour or chastity,—who, without reputation, (which is but the opinion which the world has of the matter), would hide their heads in shame, and sink down in utter despair of happiness.—No doubt the tongue is a weapon which does chastise many indecorums which the laws of men will not reach,—and keeps many in awe,—whom conscience will not,—and where the case is indisputably flagrant,—the speaking of it in such words as it deserves,—scarce comes within

within the prohibition.——In many cases 'tis hard to express ourselves *so* as to fix a distinction betwixt opposite characters,——and sometimes it may be as much a debt we owe to virtue, and as great a piece of justice to expose a vicious character, and paint it in its proper colours,——as it is to speak well of the deserving, and describe his particular virtues.——And, indeed, when we inflict this punishment upon the bad, merely out of principle, and without indulgences to pay private passion of our own,—'tis a case which happens so seldom, that one might venture to except it.

However, to those, who in this objection are really concerned for the cause of virtue, I cannot help recommending what would much more effectually serve her interest, and be a surer token of their zeal and attachment to her. And that is,——in all such plain instances, where it seems to be duty to fix a distinction betwixt the good and the bad,—to let their actions speak it instead of their words, or at least to let them both speak one language. We all of us talk so loud against vicious characters, and are so unanimous in our cry against them,——that an unexperienced man, who only trusted his ears, would imagine the whole world was in an uproar about it, and that mankind were
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all associating together, to hear vice utterly out of the world.——Shift the scene,——and let him behold the reception which vice meets with,—he will see the conduct and behaviour of the world towards it so opposite to their declarations,—he will find all he heard so contradicted by what he saw,——as to leave him in doubt which of his senses he is to trust,—or in which of the two cases mankind were really in earnest. Was there virtue enough in the world to make a general stand against this contradiction,—that is,—was every one who observed to be ill spoken of—sure to be ill looked on—too ; was it a certain consequence of the loss of a man's character,—to lose his friends,—to lose the advantages of his birth and fortune,—and thenceforth be universally shunned, universally slighted.——

Was no quality a shelter against the indecours of the other sex, but was every woman without distinction,——who had justly forfeited her reputation,——from that moment was she sure to forfeit likewise all claim to civility and respect——

Or, in a word,——could it be established as a law in our ceremonial,---that where-ever characters in either sex were become notorious,—it should be deemed infamous, either to pay or receive

ceive a visit from them, and that the door should be shut against them in all public places, till they had satisfied the world by giving testimony of a better life. — A few such plain and honest maxims, faithfully put in practice, — would force us upon some degree of reformation. Till this is done, — it avails little that we have no mercy upon them with our tongues, since they escape without feeling any other inconvenience.

We all cry out that the world is corrupt, — and I fear too justly; — but we never reflect, what we have to thank for it, and that it is our open countenance of vice, which gives the lie to our private censures of it, which is its chief protection and encouragement. — To those, however, who still believe, that evil-speaking is some terror to evil doers, one may answer, as a great man has done upon the occasion, — that after all our exhortations against it — 'tis not to be feared, but that there will be evil-speaking enough left in the world to chastise the guilty, — and we may safely trust them to an ill-natured world, that there will be no failure of justice upon this score. — The passions of men are pretty severe executioners, and to them let us leave this ungrateful talk, — and rather ourselves endeavour to cultivate that more friendly one, recommended by the apostle, —

postle,—of letting all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from us,—of being kind to one another,—tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for CHRIST's sake, forgave us. *Amen.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XII.

JOSEPH's History considered.

Forgiveness of INJURIES.

GENESIS L. 15.

And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.

THERE are few instances of the exercise of particular virtues which seem harder to attain to, or which appear more amiable and engaging in themselves, than those of moderation and the forgiveness of injuries; and when the temptations against them happen to be heightened by the bitterness of a provocation on one hand, and the fairness of an opportunity to retaliate on the other, the instances *then* are truly great and heroic. The words of the text, (which are the consultation of the sons of Jacob amongst themselves upon their father Israel's death, when, because it was in Joseph's power to revenge the deadly injury they

they had formerly done him, they concluded in course, that it was in his intention,) will lead us to a beautiful example of this kind in the character and behaviour of Joseph consequent thereupon; and as it seems a perfect and very engaging pattern of forbearance, it may not be improper to make it serve for the ground-work of a discourse upon that subject. — The whole transaction, from the first occasion given by Joseph in his youth, to this last act of remission, at the conclusion of his life, may be said to be a masterpiece of history. There is not only in the manner throughout such a happy though uncommon mixture of simplicity and grandeur, which is a double character so hard to be united, that it is seldom to be met with in compositions merely human: — but it is likewise related with the greatest variety of sender and affecting circumstances, which would afford matter for reflections useful for the conduct of almost every part and stage of a man's life. — But as the words of the text as well as the intention and compass of this discourse, particularly confine me to speak only to one point, namely, the forgiveness of injuries, it will be proper only to consider such circumstances of the story as will place this instance of it in its just light; and then proceed to make
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a more general use of the great example of moderation and forbearance which it set before us.

It seems strange, at first sight, that after the sons of Jacob had fallen into Joseph's power, when they were forced by the foreness of the famine to go down into Egypt to buy corn, and had found him too good a man even to expostulate with them for an injury, which he seemed then to have digested, and piously to have resolved into the over-ruling providence of God, for the preservation of much people, how they could ever after question the uprightness of his intentions, or entertain the least suspicion that his reconciliation was dissembled. Would not one have imagined, that the man who had discovered such a goodness of soul, that he sought where to weep, because he could not bear the struggles of a counterfeited harshness, could never be suspected afterwards of intending a real one?—and that he only waited till their father Israel's death to requite them all the evil which they had done unto him. What still adds to this difficulty is, that his affectionate manner in making himself known to them;—his goodness in forbearing, not only to reproach them for the injury they had formerly done him, but extenuating and exercising the fault to themselves, his

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comforting and speaking kindly to them, and seconding all with the tenderest marks of an undisguised forgiveness, in falling upon their necks, and weeping aloud, that all the house of Pharaoh heard him;----that, moreover, this behaviour of Joseph could not appear to them to be the effect of any warm and sudden transport, which might as suddenly give way to other reflections, but that it evidently sprung from a settled principle of uncommon generosity in his nature, which was above the temptation of making use of an opportunity for revenge, which the course of God's providence had put into his hands for better purposes; and what might still seem to confirm this, was the evidence of his actions to them afterwards, in bringing them and all their household up out of Canaan, and placing them near him in the land of Goshen, the richest part of Egypt, where they had had so many years experience of his love and kindness. And yet it is plain all this did not clear his motive from suspicion, or at least themselves of some apprehensions of a change in his conduct towards them. And was it not that the whole transaction was wrote under the direction of the Spirit of truth, and that other historians concur in doing justice to Joseph's character, and speak of him as a compassionate

passionate and merciful man, one would be apt, you will say, to imagine here, that Mo'es might possibly have omitted some circumstances of Joseph's behaviour, which had alarmed his brethren, betwixt the time of his first reconciliation and that of their father's death — For they could not be suspicious of his intentions without some cause, and fear where no fear was. — But does not a guilty conscience often do so? and though it has the grounds, yet wants the power to think itself safe.

And could we look into the hearts of those who know they deserve ill, we should find many an instance, where a kindness from an injured hand, where there was least reason to expect one, has struck deeper, and touched the heart with a degree of remorse and concern, which perhaps no severity or resentment could have reached. This reflection will in some measure help to explain this difficulty which occurs in the story. For it is observable, that when the injury they had done their brother was first committed, and the fact was fresh upon their minds, and most likely to have filled them with a sense of guilt, we find no acknowledgment or complaint to one another of such a load, as one might imagine it had laid upon them; and from that event, through a long course of years to the time they had gone
down

down to Egypt, we read not once of any sorrow or compunction of heart which they had felt during all that time, for what they had done. They had artfully imposed upon their parent—(and as men are ingenious casuists in their own affairs), they had, probably, as artfully imposed upon their own consciences;—and possibly had never impartially reflected upon the action, or considered it in its just light, 'till the many acts of their brother's love and kindness had brought it before them, with all the circumstances of aggravation which his behaviour would naturally give it.—They then began maturely to consider what they had done; —that they had first undeservedly hated him in his childhood for that, which, if it was a ground of complaint, ought rather to have been charged upon the indiscretion of the parent, than considered as a fault in him. That upon a more just examination, and a better knowledge of their brother they had wanted even that pretence.——It was not a blind partiality which seemed first to have directed their father's affection to him,——though then they thought so,—for doubtless so much goodness and benevolence as shewn forth in his nature, now that he was a man, could not lie all of it so deep concealed in his youth, but the sagacity of a
parent's

parent's eye would discover it; and that in course their enmity towards him was founded upon that which ought to have won their esteem.— That if he had incautiously added envy to their ill will, in reporting his dreams which prefiged his future greatness, it was but the indiscretion of a youth unpractised in the world, who had not yet found out the art of dissembling his hopes and expectation, and was scarce arrived at an age to comprehend there was such a thing in the world as envy and ambition:—that if such offences in a brother so fairly carried their own excuses with them, what could they say for themselves, when they considered it was for this they had almost unanimously conspired to rob him of his life?—and though they were happily restrained from shedding his blood upon Reuben's remonstrance, that they had nevertheless all the guilt of the intention to answer for. That, whatever motive it was, which then stayed their hands, their consciences told them, it could not be a good one, since they had changed the sentence for one no less cruel in itself, and what to an ingenuous nature was worse than death, to be sold for a slave.—The one was common to all,——the other only to the unfortunate. That it was not compassion which then took place, for had there been any way

way open to that, his tears and entreaties must have found it, when they saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought and they would not hear.—That if aught still could heighten the remorse of banishing a youth, without provocation from ever from his country, and the protection of his parent, to be exposed naked to the buffetings of the world, and the rough hand of some merciless master, they would find it in this reflection, “That the many afflictions and hardships which they might naturally have expected would overtake the lad, consequent upon this action, had actually fallen upon him.”

That besides the anguish of suspected virtue, he had felt that of a prison, where he had long lain neglected in a friendless condition; and where the affliction of it was rendered still sharper by the daily expectation of being remembered by Pharaoh’s chief butler, and the disappointment of finding himself ungratefully forgotten. — And though Moses tells us, that he found favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison, yet the Psalmist acquaints us that his sufferings were still grievous;—*That his feet were hurt with fetters, and the iron entered even into his soul.* And no doubt, his brethren thought the sense of their injury must have

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have entered at the same time, and was then rivetted and fixed in his mind for ever.

It is natural to imagine they argued and reflected in this manner; and there seems no necessity of seeking for the reason of their uneasiness and distrust in Joseph's conduct, or any other external cause, since the inward workings of their own minds will easily account for the evil they apprehended.—A series of benefits and kindnesses from the man they had injured, gradually heightened the idea of their own guilt, till at length they could not conceive, how the trespass could be forgiven them;——it appeared with such fresh circumstances of aggravation, that though they were convinced his repentment slept, yet they thought it only slept, and was likely some time or other to awake, and most probably then, that their father was dead, when the consideration of involving him in his revenge had ceased, and all the duty and compassion he owed to the grey hairs, and happiness of a parent, was discharged, and buried with him.

This they expressed in the consultation held amongst themselves in the words of the text: and in the following verse, we find them accordingly sending to him to deprecate the evil they dreaded; and either, because they thought
their

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their father's name more powerful than their own, in this application—or rather, that they might not commit a fresh injury in seeming to suspect his sincerity, they pretend their father's direction; for we read they sent messengers unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,—so shall you say unto Joseph,——“Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren and their sin, for they did unto thee evil: and now we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father.” The address was not without art, and was conceived in such words as seemed to suggest an argument in their favour,——as if it would not become him, who was but a fellow-servant of their father's God, to harbour revenge, or use the power their father's God had given him against his children. Nor was there a reason in any thing, but the fears of a guilty conscience to apprehend it, as appears from the reception which the address met, which was such as bespoke an uncommon goodness of nature; for when they thus spake unto him,—the historian says, he wept. Sympathy for the sorrow and distress of so many sons of his father, now all in his power,—pain at so open and ingenuous a confession of their guilt,—concern and pity for the long punishment

ment they must have endured by so stubborn a remorse, which so many years seemed not to have diminished,—the affecting idea of their condition, which had seemed to reduce them to the necessity of holding up their hands for mercy, when they had lost their protector,—so many tender passions struggling together at once overcame him;—he burst into tears, which spoke what no language could attempt. It will be needless therefore to enlarge any further upon this incident, which furnishes us with so beautiful a picture of a compassionate and forgiving temper, that I think no words can heighten it; but rather let us endeavour to find out by what helps and reasoning the patriarch might be supposed to attain to so exalted and engaging a virtue. Perhaps you will say, “That one so thoroughly convinced, as Joseph seemed to be, of the over-ruling providence of God, which so evidently makes use of the malice and passions of men, and turns them as instruments in his hands to work his own righteousness, and bring about his eternal decrees,——and of which his own history was so plain an instance, could not have far to seek for an argument to forgiveness, or feel much struggle in stifling an inclination against it.——But let any man lay his hand upon his heart and say, how often, in

instances where anger and revenge had seized him, has this doctrine come in to his aid?— In the bitterness of an affront, how often has it calmed his passions, and checked the fury of his resentment?—True and universally believed as the doctrine is amongst us, it seldom does this service, though so well suited for it, and like some wise statute, never executed or thought of, though in full force, lies as unheeded as if it was not in being.

'Tis plain 'twas otherways in the present instance, where Joseph seems to acknowledge the influence it had upon him, in his declaration, —“ *That* it was not they, but God who sent him.” And does not this virtue shine the brightest in such a pious application of the persuasion to so benevolent a purpose?

Without derogating from the merit of his forbearance, he might be supposed to have cast an eye upon the change and uncertainty of human affairs which he had seen himself, and which had convinced him we were all in one another's power by turns, and stand in need of one another's pity and compassion:——and that to restrain the cruelties, and stop the inferences of mens resentments, God has so ordered it in the course of his providence, that very often in this world—our revenges return upon
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our own heads, and mens violent dealings upon their own pates.

That besides these considerations,——that in generously forgiving an enemy, he was the truest friend to his own character, and should gain more to it by such an instance of subduing his spirit, than if he had taken a city.——The brave know only how to forgive;——it is the most refined and generous pitch of virtue, human nature can arrive at.——* Cowards have done good and kind actions,——cowards have even fought——nay sometimes even conquered;——but a coward never forgave.——It is not in his nature;——the power of doing it flows only from a strength and greatness of soul, conscious of its own force and security, and above the little temptations of resenting every fruitless attempt to interrupt its happiness. Moreover, setting aside all considerations of his character, in passing by an injury, he was the truest friend likewise to his own happiness and peace of mind; he never felt that fretful storm of passions which hurry men on to acts of revenge, or suffered those pangs of horror which pursue it.——Thus he might possibly argue, and no further;——for want of a better foundation and better helps, he could raise the building no higher;——to

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* Christian hero.

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carry it upwards to its perfection we must call in to our aid that more spiritual and refined doctrine introduced upon it by CHRIST; namely, to forgive a brother, not only to seven times, but to seventy times seven—that is, without limitation.

In this, the excellency of the gospel is said by some one, to appear with a remarkable advantage; “That a Christian is as much disposed to love and serve you, when your enemy, as the mere moral man can be, when he is your friend.”——This, no doubt, is the tendency of his religion;—but how often, or in what degrees it succeeds,—how nearly the practice keeps pace with the theory, the All-wise searcher into the hearts of men, alone is able to determine. But it is to be feared, that such great effects are not so sensibly felt, as a speculative man would expect from such powerful motives; and there is many a Christian society, which would be glad to compound amongst themselves for some lesser degrees of perfection on one hand, were they sure to be exempted, on the other, from the bad effects of those fretful passions which are ever taking, as well as ever giving the occasions of strife: the beginnings of which, Solomon aptly compares to the letting out of waters, the opening a breach which no one can be
sure

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sure to stop, till it has proceeded to the most fatal events.

With justice, therefore, might the son of Syrach conclude, concerning pride, that secret stream which administers to the overflowings of resentments, that it was not made for man, nor furious anger for him that is born of a woman: that the one did not become his station, and that the other was destructive to all the happiness he was intended to receive from it. How miserably, then, must those men turn tyrants against themselves, as well as others, who grow splenetic and revengeful, not only upon the little unavoidable oppositions and offences they must meet with in the commerce of the world, but upon those which only reach them by report; and accordingly torment their little souls with meditating how to return the injury, before they are certain they have received one? Whether this eager sensibility of wrongs and resentment arises from that general cause to which the son of Syrach seems to reduce all fierce anger and passion; or whether to a certain foreness of temper, which stands in every body's way, and therefore subject to be often hurt;—from whichever cause the disorder springs, the advice of the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus is proper: “Admonish a friend, says he, it may be he

hath not done it; and if he have, that he do it not again. Admonish thy friend, it may be he hath not said it; and if he have, that he speak it not again. There is that slippeth in his speech, but not from his heart: and who is he, who hath not offended with his tongue?"

I cannot help taking notice here of a certain species of forgiveness which is seldom enforced or thought of, and yet is no way below our regard: I mean the forgiveness of those, if we may be allowed the expression, whom we have injured ourselves. One would think that the difficulty of forgiving could only rest on the side of him who has received the wrong; but the truth of the fact is often otherwise. The consciousness of having provoked another's resentment, often excites the aggressor to keep beforehand with the man he has hurt, and not only to hate him for the evil he expects in return, but even to pursue him down, and put it out of his power to make reprisals.

The baseness of this is such, that it is sufficient to make the same observation which was made upon the crime of parricide amongst the Grecians:—it was so black,——their legislators did not suppose it would be committed, and therefore made no law to punish it.

S E R M O N XIII.

DUTY of setting Bounds to our DESIRES.

2 KINGS IV. 13.

And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care;—what is to be done for thee?—wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host?—And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

THE first part of the text was the words which the prophet Elisha puts into the mouth of his servant Gehazi, as a message of thanks to the woman of Shunem for her great kindness, and hospitality, of which, after the acknowledgement of his just sense, which Gehazi is bid to deliver in the words,—“Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care;”—he directs him to enquire, in what manner he may best make a return in discharge of the obligation;—“What shall be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host?” The last part of

the text is the Shunamite's answer, which implies a refusal of the honour or advantage which the prophet intended to bring upon her by such an application, which indirectly expresses in her contentment and satisfaction; "I dwell amongst mine own people." This instance of self-denial in the Shunamite, is but properly the introduction to her story, and gives rise to that long and very pathetic transaction which follows, in the supernatural grant of a child, which God had many years denied her;—the affecting loss of him as soon as he was grown up—and his restoration to life by Elisha, after he had been some time dead; the whole of which, though extremely interesting, and from such incidents as would afford sufficient matter for instruction, yet as it will not fall within the intention of this discourse, I shall beg leave, at this time, barely to consider these previous circumstances of it, to which the text confines me, upon which I shall enlarge with such reflections as occur, and then proceed to that practical use and exhortation, which will naturally fall from it.

We find that after Elisha had rescued the distressed widow and her two sons from the hands of the creditor, by the miraculous multiplication of her oil; that he passed on to Shunem, where, we read, was a great woman,
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and she constrained him to eat bread; and so it was, that as often as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. The sacred historian speaks barely of her temporal condition and station in life,—“That she was a great woman;” but describes not the more material part of her, her virtues and character, because they were more evidently to be discovered from the transaction itself, from which it appears, that she was not only wealthy, but likewise charitable, and of a very considerable turn of mind. For after many repeated invitations and entertainments at her house, finding his occasions called him to a frequent passage that way;——she moves her husband to set up and furnish a lodging for him, with all the conveniencies which the simplicity of those times required. “And she said unto her husband, Behold now I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually; let us make him a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.”—She perceived he was a holy man,—she had had many opportunities, as he passed by them continually, of observing his behaviour and deportment, which she had carefully remarked,

and saw plain'y what he was. That the sanctity and simplicity of his manners,—the severity of his life,—his zeal for the religion of his God, and the uncommon fervency of his devotion, when he worshipped before him, which seemed his whole business and employment upon earth;—all bespoke him not a man of this world, but one whose heart and affections were fixed upon another object, which was dearer and more important to him. But as such outward appearances may, and often have been counterfeited, so that the actions of a man are certainly the only interpreters to be relied on, whether such colours are true or false;—so she had heard that all was of a piece there, and that he was throughout consistent: that he had never, in any one instance of his life, acted as if he had any views in the affairs of this world, in which he had never interested himself at all, but where the glory of his God, or the good and preservation of his fellow creatures at first inclined him:—that in a late instance, before he came to Shunem, he had done one of the kindest and most charitable actions that a good man could have done, in assisting the widow and fatherless;—and as the fact was singular, and had just happened before her knowledge of him, no doubt she had heard the story with all the tender

tender circumstances which a true report would give it in his favour; namely, that a certain woman, whose husband was lately dead, and had left her with her children in a very helpless condition—very destitute—and what was still worse, charged with a debt she was not able to pay,—that her creditor bore exceeding hard upon her, and finding her little worth in substance, was coming to take the advantage which the law allowed of seizing her two sons for his bondsmen;—so that she had not only lost her husband, which had made her miserable enough already, but was going to be bereaved of her children, which were the only comfort and support of her life; that upon her coming to Elisha with this sad story, he was touched with compassion for her misfortunes, and had used all the power and interest which he had with his God to relieve and befriend her, which in an unheard-of manner, by the miraculous encrease of her oil, which was the only substance she had left, he had so bountifully effected, as not only to disintangle her from her difficulties in paying the debt, but withal, what was still more generous, to enable her to live comfortably the remainder of her days. She considered, that charity and compassion was so leading a virtue, and had such an instance

stance upon every other part of a man's character, as to be a sufficient proof, by itself, of the inward disposition and goodness of the heart; but that so engaging an instance of it as this, exercised in so kind and seasonable a manner, was a demonstration of his,—and that he was in truth what outward circumstance bespoke, a holy man of God.——As the Shunamite's principle and motive for her hospitality to Elisha was just, as it sprung from an idea of the worth and merit of her guest, so likewise was the manner of doing it kind and considerate. It is observable, she does not solicit her husband to assign him an apartment in her own house, but to build him a chamber in the wall apart:——she considered,—that true piety wanted no witnesses, and was always most at ease when most private;——that the tumult and distraction of a large family were not fit for the silent meditations of so holy a man, who would perpetually there meet with something either to interrupt his devotion, or offend the purity of his manners;——that, moreover, under such an independent roof, where he could take shelter as often as his occasions required, she thought he might taste the pleasure which was natural to man, possessing something like that he could call his own,—and, what
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is no small part of conferring a favour, he would scarce feel the weight of it, or at least much seldomer in this manner, than where a daily invitation and repetition of the kindness perpetually put him in mind of his obligation. If any thing could still add to this—it was—that it did not appear to be the dry offer of a faint civility, but that it came directly from the heart. There is a nicety in honest minds, which *will* not accept of a cold and suspected offer,—and even when it appears to be sincere and truly meant, there is a modesty in true merit which knows not how to accept it; and no doubt she had one, if not both these difficulties to conquer in their turns.—For we read, that she constrained him, and in all likelihood forced his acceptance of it with all the warmth and friendly openness of a humane and hospitable temper.

It is with benefits as with injuries in this respect, that we do not so much weigh the accidental good or evil they do us, as that which they were designed to do us.—That is, we consider no part of them so much as their intention; and the prophet's behaviour consequent upon this, shews he beheld it through this medium, or in some such advantageous light as I have placed it.

There is no burden so heavy to a grateful
mind,

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mind, as a debt of kindness unpaid ;—and we may believe Elisha felt it so, from the earnest desire which he had, upon the immediate receipt of this, to discharge himself of it, which he expresses in the text in the warmest manner ;
 ——— “ Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care : ——— what shall be done for thee ? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of his host ? ” — There is a degree of honest impatience in the words, such as was natural to a good man, who would not be behind-hand with his benefactor. — But there is one thing which may seem strange at first sight, that as her station and condition in life was such, that she appeared rather to have abounded already than stood in want of any thing in this world which such an application could supply, ——— why the prophet should not rather have proposed some spiritual advantage, which, as it would better have become the sanctity of his character on the one hand, so, on the other, it would have done a more real and lasting service to his friend.

But we are to reflect, that in returning favours, we act differently from what we do in conferring them : ——— in the one case, we simply consider what is best, — in the other, what is most acceptable. The reason is, that we have
 a right

a right to act according to our own ideas of what will do the party most good, in the case where we bestow a favour ;—but where we return one, we lose this right, and act according to his conceptions who has obliged us, and endeavour to repay in such a manner as we think is most likely to be accepted in discharge of the obligation.—So that, though we are not to imagine Elisha could be wanting in religious duties, as well as wishes to so hospitable a friend, we may yet suppose, he was directed here by this principle of equity,—and that, in reflecting in what manner he should requite his benefactress, he had considered, that to one of her affluent condition, who had all the reasonable comforts of an independent life,—if there was any passion, yet unsatisfied, it must certainly be ambitious: that though in general it was an irregular appetite, which in most cases 'twas dangerous to gratify, yet, in effect, 'twas only so far criminal, as the power which is acquired was perverted to bad and vicious purposes, which it was not likely to be here, from the specimen she had already given of her disposition, which shewed, that if she did wish for an increase of wealth and honour, she wished it only as it would enable her more generously to extend her arm in kind offices, and increase the power as well as the opportunities of doing good.

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In justice to Elisha's motives, which must have been good, we must suppose, he considered his offer in this light; and what principally led him to propose it, was the great interest which he had with the king of Israel at that time, which he had merited by signal service; and as he had no views for himself, he thought it could not be employed so well as in establishing the fortune of one, whose virtue might be so safely trusted with it. It was a justifiable prepossession in her favour,—though one not always to be relied on; for there is many a one who in a moderate station, and with a lesser degree of power, have behaved with honour and unblemished reputation, and who has even borne the buffetings of adverse fortune well, and manifested great presence and strength of mind under it, whom nevertheless a high exaltation has at once overcome, and so entirely changed, as if the party had lost not only his virtue, but even himself behind him.

Whether the Shunamite dreadful to make this dangerous experiment of herself,——or, which is more likely, that she had learned to set bounds to her desires, and was too well satisfied with her present condition to be tempted out of it, she declines the offer in the close of the text:—"I dwell amongst mine own people,"

as if she had said, "The intended kindness is far from being small, but it is not useful to me; I live here, as thou art a witness, in peace, in a contented obscurity;—not so high as to provoke envy, nor so low as to be trodden down and despised. In this safe and middle state, as I have lived amongst my own people, so let me die out of the reach, both of the cares and glories of the world.—'Tis fit, O holy man of God! that I learn some time or other to set bounds to my desires; and if I cannot fix them now, when I have already more than my wants require, when shall I hope to do it?—Or how should I expect that even this increase of honour or fortune would fully satisfy and content my ambition, should I now give way to it?"

So engaging an instance of unaffected moderation and self-denial deserves well to be considered by the buflers in this world;—because, if we are to trust the face and course of things, we scarce see any virtue so hard to be put in practice, and which the generality of mankind seem so unwilling to learn, as this of knowing when they have enough, and when it is time to give over their worldly pursuits.—Aye! but nothing is more easy, you will answer, than to fix this point, and set certain bounds to it.—"For my own part, you will say,

say, I declare, I want and would wish no more, but a sufficient competency of those things which are requisite to the real uses and occasions of life, suitable to the way I have been taught to expect from use and education."—But recollect how seldom it ever happens, when these points are secured, but that new occasions and new necessities present themselves, and every day as you grow richer, fresh wants are discovered, which rise up before you, as you ascend the hill; so that every step you take,——every accession to your fortune, sets your desires one degree further from rest and satisfaction:——that something you have not yet grasped, and possibly never shall;—that devil of a phantom unpossessed and unpossessable, is perpetually haunting you, and stepping in betwixt you and your contentment.—Unhappy creature! to think of enjoying that blessing without moderation!—or imagine that so sacred a temple can be raised upon the foundation of wealth or power!—If the ground-work is not laid within your own mind they will as soon add a cubit to your stature, as to your happiness.——To be convinced it is so, pray look up to those who have got as high as their warmest wishes could carry them in this ascent,——do you observe they live the better, the longer, the merrier,

—or

—or that they sleep the sounder in their beds, for having twice as much as they wanted, or well know how to dispose of?—Of all rules for calculating happiness, this is the most deceitful, and which few but weak minds, and those unpractised in the world too, ever think of applying as the measure in such an estimation.—Great and inexpressible may be the happiness, which a moderate fortune and moderate desires, with a consciousness of virtue, will secure.—Many are the silent pleasures of the honest peasant, who rises chearful to his labours—why should they not?—Look into his house, the seat of each man's happiness; has he not the same domestic endearments,—the same joy and comfort in his children, and as flattering hopes of their doing well, to enliven his honours and glad his heart, as you could conceive in the highest station?—And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true state of his joy and sufferings could be fairly balanced with those of his betters, whether any thing would appear at the foot of the account, but what would recommend the moral of this discourse. This, I own, is not to be attained to, by the cynical stale trick of haranguing against the goods of fortune,—they were never intended to be talked out of the world. ——— But as virtue
and

and true wisdom lie in the middle of extremes,
——on one hand, not to neglect and despise
riches, so as to forget ourselves; and on the o-
ther, not to pursue and love them so as to forget
God;—to have them sometimes in our heads,
——but always something more important in our
hearts.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XIV.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

ISAIAH I 3.

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;—but Israel doth not know, —my people doth not consider.

'TIS a severe but an affectionate reproach of the prophet's, laid against the Israelites,—which may safely be applied to every heedless and unthankful people, who are neither won by God's mercies, nor terrified by his punishments.—There is a giddy, thoughtless, intemperate spirit gone forth into the world, which possesses the generality of mankind;—and the reason the world is undone, is, because the world does not consider,—considers neither awful regard to God, nor the true relation themselves bear to him.—Could they consider this, and learn to weigh the causes, and compare the consequences of things, and to exercise the reason which God has put into us for the government and direction of our lives,—there would be some hopes of a reformation:—but, as the world goes, there is no leisure for such enquiries,

ries, and so full are our minds of other matters, that we have no time to ask, or a heart to answer the questions we ought to put to ourselves.

Whatever our condition is, 'tis good to be acquainted with it in time, to be able to supply what is wanting,—and examine the state of our accounts, before we come to give them up to an impartial judge.

The most inconsiderate see the reasonableness of this,—there being few, I believe, either so thoughtless, or even so bad, but that they sometimes enter upon their duty, and have some short intervals of self-examination, which they are forced upon, if from no other motive, yet at least to free themselves from the load and oppression of spirits they must necessarily be subject to without it.—But as the scripture frequently intimates,—and observation confirms it daily,—that there are many mistakes attending the discharge of this duty,—I cannot make the remainder of this discourse more useful, than by a short enquiry into them. I shall therefore, first, beg leave to remind you of some of the many unhappy ways by which we often set about this irksome task of examining our works, without being either the better or the wiser for the employment.

And first, then, let us begin with that which is the foundation of almost all the other false
measures

measures we take in this matter, — that is, the setting about the examination of our works, before we are prepared with honest dispositions to amend them. — This is beginning the work at the wrong end. These previous dispositions in the heart, are the wheels that should make this work go easily and successfully forwards, — and to take them off, and proceed without them, 'tis no miracle if, like Pharaoh's chariots, they that drive them, — drive them heavily along.

Besides, if a man is not sincerely inclined to reform his faults, — 'tis not likely he should be inclined to see them, — nor will all the weekly preparations that ever were wrote, bring him nearer the point; — so that, with how serious a face soever he begins to examine, — he no longer does the office of an enquirer, — but an apologist, whose business is not to search for truth, — but skilfully to hide it. — So long — therefore, as this pre-engagement lasts betwixt the man and his old habits, — there is little prospect of proving his works to any good purpose — of whatever kind they are, with so strong an interest and power on their side. — As in other trials, so in this, 'tis no wonder if the evidence is puzzled and confounded, and the several facts and circumstances so twisted from their natural shapes, and the whole proof so altered and confirmed

firmed on the other side,—as to leave the last state of that man even worse than the first.

A second unhappy, though general mistake in this great duty of proving our works,——is that which the apostle hints at: in the doing it, not by a direct examination of our own actions, but from a comparative view of them, with the lives and actions of other men.

When a man is going to enter upon this work of self-examination,——there is nothing so common, as to see him——look round him——instead of looking *within* him.——He looks round,—finds out some one who is more malicious,—sees another that is more covetous, a third that is more proud and imperious than himself,—and so indirectly forms a judgment of himself, not from a review of his life, and a proving of his own works, as the apostle directs him, but rather from proving the works of others, and from their infirmities and defects drawing a deceitful conclusion in favour of himself.——In all competitions of this kind—one may venture to say, there will be ever so much of self-love in a man, as to draw a flattering likeness of one of the parties—and 'tis well—if he has not so much malignity too, as to give but a coarse picture of the other,—fi-
nished

nished with so many hard strokes, as to make the one as unlike its original as the other.

Thus the pharisee, when he entered the temple,—no sooner saw the publican, but that moment he formed the idea to himself of all the vices and corruptions that could possibly enter into the man's character,—and with great dexterity stated all his own virtues and good qualities over-against them. His abstinence and frequent fastings, exactness in the debts and ceremonies of the law; not balancing the account as he ought to have done, in this manner:—What! though this man is a publican and a sinner, have I not my vices as well as he? 'Tis true, his particular office exposes him to many temptations of committing extortion and injustice;—but then—am not I a devourer of widows houses, and guilty of one of the most cruel instances of the same crime? He possibly is a profane person, and may set religion at naught;—but do not I myself, for a pretence, make long prayers, and bring the greatest of all scandals upon religion, by making it the cloak to my ambition and worldly views?—If he, lastly, is debauched or intemperate—am not I conscious of as corrupt and wanton dispositions; and that a fair and guarded outside is my best pretence to the opposite character.

If a man will examine his works by a comparative view of them with others;—this, no doubt, would be the fairer way, and least likely to mislead him.—But as this is seldom the method this trial is gone through,—in fact it generally turns out to be as treacherous and delusive to the man himself,——as it is uncandid to the man who is dragged into the comparison; and whoever judges of himself by this rule,—so long as there is no scarcity of vicious characters in the world,—’tis to be feared, he will often take the occasions of triumph and rejoicing,—where, in truth, he ought rather to be sorry and ashamed.

A third error in the manner of proving our works, is what we are guilty of, when we leave out of the calculation the only material parts of them;—I mean, the motives and first principles from whence they proceeded. There is many a fair instance of generosity, chastity, and self-denial, which the world may give a man the credit of,—which, if he would give himself the leisure to reflect upon, and trace back to their first springs,—he would be conscious proceeded from such views and intentions as, if known, would not be to his honour.—The truth of this may be made evident by a thousand instances in life;—and yet there is nothing more
usual

usual than for a man, when he is going upon this duty of self examination,— instead of calling his own ways to remembrance,——to close the whole enquiry at once, with this short challenge;———“*That he desires the world to say ill of him.*” If the world has no express evidence, this indeed may be an argument of his good luck,---but no satisfactory one of the real goodness and innocence of his life.---A man may be a very bad man,---and yet, through caution,---through deep-laid policy and design, may so guard all outward appearances, as never to want this negative testimony on his side,---*that the world knows no evil of him,*---how little soever he deserves it.---Of all assays upon a man’s self, this may be said to be the slightest; this method of proving the goodness of our works---differing but little in kind from that unhappy one, which many unwary people take in proving the goodness of their coin,---which, if it happens to be suspicious,---instead of bringing it either to the balance or the touch-stone to try its worth,---they ignorantly go forth; try if they can pass it upon the world:-- if so, all is well, and they are saved all the expence and pains of enquiring after and detecting the cheat.

A fourth error, in this duty of examination of mens works,---is that of committing the

task of others;—an error into which thousands of well-meaning creatures are insnared in the Romish church, by her doctrines of auricular confession, of works of supererogation, and the many lucrative practices raised upon that capital stock.—The trade of which is carried to such a height in Popish countries, that if you was at Rome or Naples now, and was disposed, in compliance with the apostle's exhortation in the text, to set about this duty, to prove your *own* works,—'tis great odds whether you would be suffered to do it yourself, without interruption; and you might be said to have escaped well, if the first person you consulted upon it did not talk you out of your resolution, and possibly your senses too at the same time.—Prove your works!—For heaven's sake, desist from so rash an undertaking;—what!—trust your own skill and judgment in a matter of so much difficulty and importance—when there are so many whose business it is,—who understand it so well, and who can do it for you with so much safety and advantage?

If your works must be proved, you would be advised, by all means, to send them to undergo this operation with some one who knows, what he is about, either some expert and noted confessor of the church,—or to some convent or religious

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religious society, who are in possession of a large stock of good works of all kinds, wrought up by saints and confessors, where you may suit yourself---and either get the defects of your own supplied,---or be accommodated with new ones, ready proved to your hands, sealed and certified to be so by the Pope's commissary, and the notaries of his ecclesiastic court. There needs little more to lay open this fatal error,---than barely to represent it. So I shall only add a short remark,---that they who are persuaded to be thus virtuous by proxy, and will provoke the goodness of their works only by deputies,---will have no reason to complain against God's justice,---if he suffers them to go to heaven only in the same manner,---that is,---by deputies too.

The last mistake which I shall have time to mention, is that which the Methodists have retired, for 'tis no new error---but one which has misled thousands before these days, wherever enthusiasm had got footing,---and that is ---the attempting to prove their works by that very argument which is the greatest proof of their weakness and superstition;---I mean, that extraordinary impulse and intercourse with the Spirit of God which they pretend to, and whose operations (if you trust them) are so sensibly felt in their hearts and souls, as to render,

at once, all other proofs of their works needless to themselves.—This, I own, is one of the most summary ways of proceeding in this duty of self-examination, and as it proves a man's works in the gross, it saves him a world of sober thought and enquiry after many vexatious particulars.

Indeed, if the premises were true,—the inference is direct. For when a man dreams of these inward workings—and wakes with the impression of them strong upon his brain; 'tis not strange he should think himself a chosen vessel,——sanctified within, and sealed up upon the perfect day of redemption; and so long as such a one is led captive to this error,—there is nothing in nature to induce him to this duty of examining his own works in the sense of the prophet:—for however bad they are,—so long as his credulity and enthusiasm equal them, 'tis impossible they should disturb his conscience, or frighten him into a reformation. These are some of the unhappy mistakes in the many methods this work is set about,—which in a great measure rob us of the fruit we expected—and sometimes so entirely blast them, that we are neither the better or wiser for all the pains we have taken.

There

There are many other false steps which lead us the same way,---but the delineation of these, however, may serve at present, not only as so many land-marks to guard us from this dangerous coast which I have described, but to direct us likewise into that safe one, where we can only expect the reward the gospel promises. For if, according to the first recited causes, a man fails in examining his works, from a disinclination to reform them,-----from partiality of comparisons,-----from flattery to his own motives, and a vain dependence upon the opinion of the world-----the conclusion is unavoidable;-----that he must search for the qualities the most opposite to these for his conductors. -----And if he hopes to discharge this work so as to have advantage from it,---that he must set out upon the principles of an honest head; willing to reform itself, and attached principally to that object, without regard to the spiritual condition of others, or the misguided opinions which the world may have of himself.

That, for this end,---he must call his own ways to remembrance, and search out his spirit; --search his actions, with the same critical exactness and the same piercing curiosity, we are wont to sit in judgment upon others;--varnishing nothing and disguising nothing. If

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he proceeds thus, and in every relation of life takes a full view of himself without prejudice, ---traces his actions to their principles without mercy, and looks into the dark corners and recesses of his heart without fear---and if upon such an enquiry---he acts consistent with his view in it, by reforming his errors, separating the dross, and purifying the whole mass with repentance;---this will bid fair for examining a man's works in the apostle's sense:---and whoever discharges the duty thus---with a view to scripture, which is the rule in this case---and to reason, which is the applier of this rule in all cases---need not fear but he will have what the prophet calls *rejoicing in himself*, and that he will lay the foundation of his peace and comfort where it ought to lie---that is, within himself---in the testimony of a good conscience, and the joyful expectation, that having done his utmost to examine his *own* works here, that God will accept them hereafter, through the merits of CHRIST, which God grant. *Amen.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XV.

JOB's Expostulation with his WIFE:

J O B II. 10.

*What!—shall we receive good at the hand of
God, and shall we not receive evil also?*

TH E S E are the words of Job, uttered in the depth of his misfortunes, by way of reproof to his wife, for the counsel we find she had given him in the foregoing verse; namely, not to retain his integrity any longer,—but to *curse God and die*. Though it is not very evident, what was particularly meant and implied in the words—“Curse God and die,”—yet it is certain, from Job's reply to them, that they directed him to some step which was rash and unwarrantable, and probably, as it is generally explained, meant that he should openly call God's justice to an account, and by a blasphemous accusation of it, provoke God to destroy his being: as if she had said,——After so many sad things which have befallen thee, notwithstanding thy integrity, what gaineest thou by serving God, seeing he bears thus hard upon thee,

K 5.

thee, as though thou wast his enemy;—
 Ought so faithful a servant as thou hast been, to
 receive so unkind treatment at his hands;—
 and tamely to submit to it?—patiently to sustain
 the evils he has brought upon thy house, and
 neither murmur with, thy lips, nor charge him
 with injustice?—bear it not thus;—and as thy
 pity could not at first protect thee from such mis-
 fortunes,—nor thy behaviour under them could
 since move God to take pity on thee;—change
 thy conduct towards him,—boldly expostulate
 with him,—upbraid him openly with unkind-
 ness,—call his justice and providence to an ac-
 count for oppressing thee in so undeserved a man-
 ner, and get that benefit by provoking him,
 which thou hast not been able to obtain by ser-
 ving him:—to die at once by his hands, and
 be freed, at least, from the greater misery of a
 lingering, and a more tormenting death.

On the other hand, some interpreters tell
 us,—that the word *curse*, in the original, is
 equivocal, and does more literally signify here,
 to bless, than to blaspheme; and consequently
 that the whole is rather to be considered as a
 sarcastical scoff at Job's piety.—As if it had
 been said;—Go to—bless God,—and die;—
 since thou art so ready to praise him in troubles
 as thou hast done, go on in thy own way, and
 see

see how God will reward thee, by a miserable death which thou canst not avoid.

Without disputing the merit of these two interpretations, it may not seem an improbable conjecture, that the words imply something still different from what is expressed in either of them : —and instead of supposing them as an incitement to blaspheme God, —which was madness, ———or that they were intended as an insult, which was natural ; —that her advice to curse God and die, was meant here, that he should resolve upon a voluntary death himself, which was an act not only in her own power, but what carried some appearance of a remedy with it, and promised, at least at first sight, some respite from pain, as it would put an end, both to his life and misfortune together.

One may suppose, that with all the concern and affection which was natural, she beheld her lord afflicted both with poverty and sickness ; —by one sudden blow brought down from his palace to the dunghill. ——— In one mournful day, she saw, that not only the fortunes of his house were blasted, but likewise the hopes of his posterity cut off for ever by the untimely loss of his children. ——— She knew he was a virtuous and an upright man, and deserved a better fate ; ——— her heart bled the more for him. ———

him,—she saw the prospect before him was dreadful,——that there appeared no possible means which could retrieve the sad situation of his affairs;——that death, the last—the surest friend to the unfortunate, could only set him free;—and that it was better to resolve upon that at once, than vainly endeavour to wade through such a sea of troubles, which in the end would overwhelm him.—We may suppose her spirits sinking under these apprehensions, when she began to look upon his constancy as a fruitful virtue, and from that persuasion, to have said unto him,—Curse God,—depend no longer upon him, nor wait the issue of his providence, which has already forsaken thee;——as there is no help from that quarter,—resolve to extricate thyself—and since thou hast met with no justice in this world,—leave it,—die—and force thy passage into a better country, where misfortunes cannot follow thee.

Whether this paraphrase upon the words is just, or the former interpretations be admitted,——the reply in the text is equally proper;——What!——shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil also? Are not both alike the dispensations of an all-wise and good being, who knows and determines

mines what *is best*? and wherefore should I make myself the judge, to receive the one, and yet be so partial as to reject the other, when, by fairly putting both into the scale, I may be convinced how much the good outweighs the evil in all cases? in my own, consider how strong this argument is against me.

In the beginning of my days, how did God crown me with honour? in how remarkable a manner did his providence set a hedge about me, and about all that I had on every side?—how he prospered the works of my hands, so that our substance and happiness encreased every day?

And now, when, for reasons best known to his infinite wisdom, he has thought fit to try me with afflictions,—shall I rebel against him in sinning with my lips, and charging him foolishly?—God forbid.—O rather may I look up towards that hand which has bruised me,—for he maketh sore and he bindeth up,—he woundeth, and his hands make whole; from his bounty only has issued all I had; from his wisdom,—all I have lost; for he giveth and he hath taken away,—blessed be his name.

There are few instances of particular virtue more engaging than those of this heroic cast; and if we may take the testimony of a Heathen philoso-

philosopher upon it, there is not an object in this world which God can be supposed to look down upon with greater pleasure, than that of a good man involved in misfortunes, surrounded on all sides with difficulties,——yet chearfully bearing up his head, and struggling against them with firmness and constancy of mind.—Certainly to our conceptions such objects must be truly engaging;——and the reason of so exalted an encomium from this hand is easy to be guessed: no doubt the wisest of the Heathen philosophers had found, from observation upon the life of man, that the many troubles and infirmities of his nature, the sicknesses, disappointments, sorrows for the loss of children or property, with the numberless other calamities and cross accidents to which the life of man is subject, were in themselves so *great*,---and so *little* solid comfort to be administered from the mere refinements of philosophy in such emergencies, that there was no virtue which required greater efforts, or which was found so difficult to be atchieved upon moral principles; upon moral principles—which had no foundation to sustain this great weight, which the infirmities of our nature laid upon it. And for this reason 'tis observable, that there is no subject upon which the moral writers of antiquity have exhausted

exhausted so much of their eloquence, or where they have spent such time and pains, as in this of endeavouring to reconcile men to these evils. Inſomuch, that from thence, in moſt modern languages, the patient enduring of afflictions has by degrees obtained the name of philoſophy, and almoſt monopolized the word to itſelf, as if it was the chief end or compendium of all the wiſdom which philoſophy had to offer. And indeed, conſidering what lights they had, ſome of them wrote extremely well; yet, as what they ſaid proceeded more from the head than the heart, 'twas generally more calculated to ſilence a man in his troubles, than to convince, and teach him how to bear them. And therefore, however ſubtle and ingenious their arguments might appear in the reading, 'tis to be feared they loſt much of their efficacy, when tried in the application. If a man was thruſt back in the world by diſappointments, or — as was Job's caſe — had ſuffered a ſudden change in his fortunes; from an affluent condition was brought down by a train of cruel accidents, and pinched with poverty, — philoſophy would come in, and exhort him to ſtand his ground; — it would tell him, that the ſame greatneſs and ſtrength of mind, which enabled him to behave well in the days of his proſperity, ſhould equally enable

enable him to behave well in the days of his adversity;—that it was the property of only weak and base spirits, who were insolent in the one, to be dejected and overthrown by the other; whereas great and generous souls were at all times calm and equal—As they enjoyed the advantages of life with indifference,—they were able to resign them with the same temper,—and consequently,—were out of the reach of fortune. All which, however fine, and likely to satisfy the fancy of a man at ease, could convey but little consolation to a heart already pierced with sorrow:—nor is it to be conceived how an unfortunate creature should any more receive relief from such a lecture, however just, than a man racked with an acute fit of the gout or stone, could be supposed to be set free from torture, by hearing from his physician a nice dissertation upon his case. The philosophic consolations in sickness, or in affliction for the death of friends and kindred, were just as efficacious,—and were rather in general to be considered as good sayings than good remedies. ——— So that, if a man was bereaved of a promising child, in whom all his hopes and expectations centred—or a wife was left destitute to mourn the loss and protection of a kind and tender husband, Seneca or Epictetus would tell
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the pensive parent and disconsolate widow,—— that tears and lamentations for the dead were fruitless and absurd;——that to die, was the necessary and unavoidable debt of nature;—— and as it could admit of no remedy——’twas impious and foolish to grieve and fret themselves upon it. Upon such sage counsel, as well as many other lessons of the same stamp, the same reflection might be applied, which is said to have been made by one of the Roman emperors, to one who administered the same consolations to him on a like occasion—to whom, advising him to be comforted, and make himself easy, since the event had been brought about by a fatality, and could not be helped, —he replied,——“ That this was so far from lessening his trouble——that it was the very circumstance which occasioned it.” So that, upon the whole,——when the true value of these, and many more of their current arguments, have been weighed and brought to the test—one is led to doubt, whether the greatest part of their heroes, the most renowned for constancy, were not much more indebted to good nerves and spirits, or the natural happy frame of their tempers for behaving well, than to any extraordinary helps which they could be supposed to receive from their instructors. And there-

therefore I should make no scruple to assert, that one such instance of patience and resignation as this, which the scripture gives us in the person of Job; not of one most pompously declaiming upon the contempt of pain and poverty, but of a man sunk in the lowest condition of humanity,—o behold him, when stripped of his estate—his wealth, his friends, his children,—cheerfully holding up his head, and entertaining his hard fortune with firmness and serenity,—and this, not from a stoical stupidity, but a just sense of God's providence, and a persuasion of his justice and goodness in all his dealing;—such an example, I say, as this, is of more universal use, speaks truer to the heart, than all the heroic precepts, which the pedantry of philosophy has to offer.

This leads me to the point I aim at in this discourse;—namely, that there are no principles but those of religion to be depended on in cases of real stress, and that these are able to encounter the worst emergencies, and to bear us up under all the changes and chances to which our life is subject.

Consider then what virtue the very first principle of religion has, and how wonderfully it is conducive to this end; That there is a God, a powerful, a wise and good being, who first
made

made the world, and continues to govern it;—by whose goodness all things are designed—and by whose providence all things are conducted to bring about the greatest and best ends. The sorrowful and pensive wretch that was giving way to his misfortunes, and mournfully sinking under them, the moment this doctrine comes in to his aid, hushes all his complaints—and thus speaks comfort to his soul,——“ It is the LORD, let him do what seeme h him good:—without his direction I know that no evil can befall me,—without his permission, that no power can hurt me:—it is impossible a being so wise should mistake my happiness—or that a being so good should contradict it. If he has denied me riches or other advantages,—perhaps he foresees the gratifying my wishes would undo me, and by my own abuse of them be perverted to my ruin.——If he has denied me the request of children,——or in his providence has thought fit to take them from me—how can I say—whether he has not dealt kindly with me, and only taken that away which he foresaw would embitter and shorten my days.—It does so, to ten thousands, where the disobedience of a thankless child has brought down the parent’s grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Has he visited me with sickness, poverty, or other disappointments?

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ments?—can I say, but these are blessings in disguise?—so many different expressions of his care and concern, to disintangle my thoughts from this world, and fix them upon another, —another, a better world beyond this!”——

This thought opens a new scene of hope and consolation to the unfortunate;——and as the persuasion of a providence reconciles him to the evils he has suffered,——this prospect of a future life gives him strength to despise them, and esteem the light afflictions of his life, as they are, not worthy to be compared to what is reserved for him hereafter.

Things are great or small by comparison——and he who looks no further than this world, and balances the accounts of his joys and sufferings from that consideration, finds all his sorrows enlarged, and at the close of them will be apt to look back, and cast the same sad reflection upon the whole which the patriarch did to Pharaoh,——“That few and evil had been the days of his pilgrimage.” But let him lift up his eyes towards heaven, and stedfastly behold the life and immortality of a future state,——he then wipes away all tears from off his eyes for ever and ever;——like the exiled captive, big with the hopes that he is returning home,——he feels not the weight of his chains, or counts the
days

days of his captivity; but looks forward with rapture towards the country where his heart is fled before.

These are the aids which religion offers us towards the regulating of our spirit under the evils of life:—but like great cordials,—they are seldom used but on greater occurrences. —In the lesser evils of life we seem to stand unguarded—and our peace and contentment are overthrown, and our happiness broke in upon by a little impatience of spirit under the cross and untoward accidents we meet with.—These stand unprovided for, and we neglect them, as we do the lighter indispositions of the body——which we think not worth treating seriously—and so leave them to nature. In good habits of the body this may do,—and I would gladly believe, there are such good habits of the temper,—such a complexional ease and health of heart, as may often save the patient much medicine.—We are still to consider——that however such good frames of mind are got—they are worth preserving by all rules; —patience and contentment,—which, like the treasure hid in the field, for which a man sold all he had to purchase—is of that price, that it cannot be had at too great a purchase, since, without it, the best condition in
life

life cannot make us happy, — and with it, it is impossible we should be miserable even in the worst. — Give me leave, therefore, to close this discourse with some reflections upon the subject of a contented mind — and the duty in man of regulating his spirit, in our way through life; — a subject in every body's mouth — preached upon daily to our friends and kindred — but too oft in such a style, as to convince the party lectured only of this truth; — that we bear the misfortunes of others with excellent tranquility.

I believe there are thousands so extravagant in their ideas of contentment, as to imagine that it must consist in having every thing in this world turn out the way they wish — that they are to sit down in happiness, and feel themselves so at ease at all points, as to desire nothing better and nothing more. I own there are instances of some, who seem to pass through the world as if all their paths had been strewed with rose-buds of delight; — but a little experience will convince us, 'tis a fatal expectation to go upon. — We are born to trouble; and we may depend upon it, whilst we live in this world, we shall have it, though with intermissions, — that is, in whatever state we are, we shall find a mixture of good and evil; and therefore the true way to contentment is, to know

know to receive these certain vicissitudes of life,——the returns of good and evil, to as neither to be exalted by the one, or overthrown by the other; but to bear ourselves, towards every thing which happens, with such ease and indifference of mind, as to hazard as little as may be. This is the true temperate climate fitted for us by nature, and in which every wise man would wish to live—God knows, we are perpetually straying out of it, and by giving wings to our imaginations, in the transports we dream of, from such or such a situation in life, we are carried away alternately into all the extremes of hot and cold, for which, as we are neither fitted by nature, or prepared by expectation, we feel them with all their violence, and with all their danger too.

God, for wise reasons, has made our affairs in this world almost as fickle and capricious as ourselves.—Pain and pleasure, like light and darkness, succeed each other; and he that knows how to accommodate himself to their periodical returns, and can wisely extract the good from the evil,—knows only how to live;——this is true contentment, at least all that is to be had of it in this world, and for this every man must be indebted not to his fortune, but to himself.—And, indeed, it would have been strange, if a
duty

duty so becoming us as dependent creatures—
 and so necessary besides to all our well-beings,
 had been placed out of the reach of any in some
 measure to put in practice——and for this rea-
 son, there is scarce any lot so low, but there is
 something in it to satisfy the man whom it has
 befallen; providence having so ordered things,
 that in every man's cup, how bitter soever, there
 are some cordial drops——some good cir-
 cumstances, which, if wisely extracted, are
 sufficient for the purpose he wants them,——
 that is, to make him contented, and if not hap-
 py, at least resigned. May God bless us all
 with this spirit, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST.

Amen.

T H E E N D.

